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The Story of Assisi

"Between Tupino, and the wave that falls
From blest Ubaldo's chosen hill, there hangs
Rich slope of mountain high, whence heat and cold
Are wafted through Perugia's eastern gate:
And Nocera with Gualdo, in its rear,
Mourn for their heavy yoke. Upon that side,
Where it doth break its steepness most, arose
A sun upon the world, as duly this
From Ganges doth: therefore let none who speak
Of that place, say Ascesi; for its name
Were lamely so deliver'd; but the East,
To call things rightly, be it henceforth styled."

DANTE, *Paradiso*, xi. (Cary's translation).

P. Lunghi. Photo.

Statue of St Francis.
by Andrea della Robbia in Sta Maria degli Angeli.

The Story of Assisi

by Lina Duff Gordon

Illustrated by Nelly Erichsen and Helen M. James

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To

Margaret Vaughan

this small book is affectionately dedicated
in remembrance of days spent together
in the Umbrian country

NOTE

MY sincerest thanks are due to my aunt Mrs Ross, to Mrs Vaughan, Dr E. Percival Wright, M. Paul Sabatier, Mr Sidney Colvin, Sir William Markby and Mr Pearsall Smith, for the help rendered me in various ways during the writing of this book. I wish further to acknowledge the kindness of Mr Roger Fry who allowed me to quote from his lectures on Art delivered this year in London, before they were published in the *New Monthly Review*; and also the generous permission of Mr Anderson (Rome), and Signor Lunghi (Assisi), for allowing me to use their photographs. For the loan of old Italian books I am indebted to Cav. Bruschi, Librarian of the Marucelliana at Florence, to Professor Bellucci, Professor of the University of Perugia, and to Signor Rossi, proprietor of the Hotel Subasio at Assisi, whose intimate knowledge of his native town has been of great service to me.

L. D. G.

Poggio Gherardo,
Florence, *October* 1900.

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The Story of Assisi

CHAPTER I

War and Strife

"C'était le temps des guerres sans pitié et des inimitiés mortelles." H. TAINE. *Voyage en Italie. Perouse et Assise.*

ALL who ascend the hill of the Seraphic City must feel its indescribable charm—intangible, mysterious, and quite distinct from the beauty of the Umbrian valley. "Why," we ask ourselves, "this stillness and sense of marvellous peace in every church and every street?" And, as though conscious of our thoughts, a young Assisan, with a gesture of infinite sadness towards the large, desolate palaces and broad deserted streets, said, as we lingered on our way: "Ah! Signore mie, our city is a city of the dead—of memories only." As he spoke a long procession of a grey-clothed confraternity, bearing on their breasts the franciscan badge, preceded by a priest who walked beneath a baldachino, streamed out of a small church. Slowly they passed down the road, and then the priest turned into a wayside cottage where lay a dying woman, while the others waited outside under the olive trees. But the sound of their chanting and the tinkling of the small bell came to us as we leaned over the city walls. Of a truth we felt the religious life of the town was not dead: perchance, down those streets, now so

still, men had passed along to battle during the sad turmoil of the middle ages, had hated and loved as well as prayed, with all the fervour of their southern nature. We must turn to the early chroniclers to find in their fascinating pages that Assisi has had her passionate past and her hours of deepest trial.

Her origin goes back to the days when the Umbrians, one of the most ancient people of Italy, inhabited the country north and south of the Tiber, and lived a wild life in caves. But the past is very dim; some Umbrian inscriptions, a few flint arrow heads, and some hatchets made of jade found on the shore of lake Thrasymene are the only records we possess of these early settlers.

If written history of their ways and origin is lacking, the later chroniclers of Assisi endeavour to supply with their gossip, what is missing. Rambling and strange as their legends often seem to us, nevertheless they contain a germ of truth, an image, faint but partly true of a time so infinitely far away. Most of the local Umbrian historians have awarded the honour of the foundation of their own particular town to the earliest heroes whom they happen to know of, and these are invariably Noah and his family. It is, therefore, curious to note that the Assisan chroniclers have departed from this custom and have woven for themselves a legend so different from the usual friar's tale: "Various are the opinions," says one of them, "concerning the first building of our city; but the most probable, and the most universally accepted by serious writers, is the one which gives Dardanus as her founder. In the year 713 after the Deluge, and 865 years before the foundation of Rome, the first civil war in Italy broke out between the brothers Jasius and Dardanus, both sons of Electra; but the father of Jasius was Jupiter, while Dardanus was the son of Corythus, King of Cortona."

The people of Umbria took sides, as some would have it that Jasius ought to be king in the place of the dead prince Corythus. Now it happened that Dardanus had pitched his tent on the slope of Mount Subasio, when a dream came to him that Jupiter and Minerva were preparing to assail the enemy, and that Jasius would be vanquished. On waking he determined, should his dream be true, to raise a temple to the goddess on the spot where he had slept. He went forth to battle, and with the help of the goddess drove the enemy back with great slaughter; Jasius was killed and they buried him on the field of battle. "Full well did Dardanus keep his vow, for in a few months there arose a wonderful building, now known as the sacred temple, dedicated to the true Minerva of Heaven, under the name of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva. Thus it is that the country round Assisi has been called *Palladios agros*, the fields of Pallas." [1]

THE TEMPLE OF MINERVA

[1] The legend may have arisen from the fact that Minerva had a temple near Miletos under the title of Assesia and the legend-weavers have caught at the similarity of sound to that of their own Umbrian town.

And thus the monk dreams on about the Seraphic Province of Umbria; and we dream with him of the Umbrians who forsook the chase and their shepherd huts on the heights about Subasio, to gather round the marvellous temple built by the hero ere he went forth to found the city of Troy. People came from afar to look at the six-fluted columns, and while marvelling at a thing so fair, they resolved to build their homes within sight and under the shadow of the sacred walls. Here was the nucleus of a future town. The simple shelters of cane and brushwood were soon replaced by huts of a neater pattern made of wattle and clay, with earthen floors, rounded porches and pent roofs. The dwellers by the temple throve and prospered, and all was peace for a while, until the van-guard of that mysterious people, the Etruscans, appeared on the Umbrian horizon. We are told how Dardanus, while visiting the King of Lydia on his way to Troy, drew such a highly-coloured picture of the loveliness of Tuscany, the fruitful qualities of the soil, and the lightness of the air, that Tyrrhenus, the king's son, was immediately sent with a large army to take possession of so rich a province. Then came a struggle, and the Umbrian tribes were driven back south of the Tiber, which henceforth strictly defined the boundary between Umbria and Etruria.

Immediately to the west of Assisi, and on the longest spur of hills which juts out into the valley of the Tiber, stood the now Etruscan city of Perugia, to which a band of Etruscans had lately immigrated. The huge, grim walls which grew up round it after the advent of the new settlers, the narrow pointed gateways, some guarded by heads of stern and unknown deities, the general menacing and ferocious aspect of its buildings, soon warned the smaller Umbrian cities of what they might in coming ages expect from her inhabitants.

It is probable that skirmishes were frequent between the neighbouring towns of Assisi and Perugia, and to judge from the subterranean passages which still exist beneath the streets of the former place, we may gather that she was open to constant attacks, and that her inhabitants found it more prudent to disappear underground at the approach of enemies than to meet them in open battle. These subterranean galleries, cut in the soft tufa, extend for miles under the present city: branching out in all directions they form a veritable labyrinth of secret passages. Here swiftly and silently as the foe advanced, men and women with their children would disappear into the bowels of the earth, some being occasionally buried beneath masses of soil shaken down by the tramp of many feet above them. Repeated dangers of this sort at last decided the Assisans to meet their enemies in more war-like fashion, and to surround themselves—as Perugia had done—with stones and mortar. Soon the town bristled with towers and turreted gateways, and the houses, no longer built of wattle and mud, began to foreshadow the strongly fortified palaces of a later date. None too soon did Assisi prepare for war. In the year 309 B.C. the shrill sound of the Roman clarion echoed through the Cimminian forest. It roused Etruria to arms, proclaiming the fact that the Romans had dared to penetrate beyond this dangerous barrier which hitherto had been deemed impassable. The Etruscans and Umbrians, forgetting all their former strifes, now joined against the new power which threatened to crush their liberties. The battles which followed beneath the walls of Perugia, and by Bevagna in the plain of the Clitumnus, brought all Umbria, in the space of a single year, under the yoke of Rome.

And now, although we leave the fields of legend and enter those of history, we find but little mention

of Assisi: this is, however, easily accounted for. Built upon the unfrequented slopes of Mount Subasio, like a flower gradually opening to the sun's rays, she was far more secure than her neighbour Perugia who, commanding and commanded by the road from Rome to Ravenna, along which an army passed, stood in haughty and uncompromising pre-eminence. The comparatively obscure position of Assisi therefore gave her long periods of peace, and these she employed in building innumerable temples, a theatre, and a circus. It is impossible to excavate in any part of Assisi without coming upon relics of that time. Statues and busts of the Cæsars, of gods and of consuls, are lying in dark corners of the communal palace, and broken fragments of delicately-wrought friezes and heads of goddesses, half buried in bushes of oleander, adorn the Assisan gardens. Beneath the foundations of the more modern houses, mosaic floors and frescoed walls have been found, showing that Assisi had her years of early splendour. But full of life and action as this Roman period was, it is as completely hidden from us as are the temples now buried beneath the present town. It passed rapidly away, and yet is of some importance in the history of the world as having witnessed the birth of Sex. Aurelius Propertius, great among the poets even at a time when Virgil, Horace, and a host of others were filling Italy with their song.

Many an Umbrian town prides itself on being the birthplace of Propertius. The people of Spello have even placed a tablet in their walls to claim him as her son; but the Assisans, ignoring the rivalry of others, very quietly point to the many inscriptions of the Propertius family collected beneath the portico of the Temple of Minerva. One may be noticed referring to C. Passennus Sergius Paullus Propertius Blaesus, said to be a lineal descendant of the poet, who is supposed

to have married after the death of the fair Cynthia, and returned to his native valley to pass his last days in domestic tranquillity. Angelo Poliziano, on the margin of an early edition of the poet's works now in the Laurentian Library of Florence, has made a note to the effect that Propertius, as well as St. Francis, was born at Assisi; and certainly modern writers assign the honour to Assisi.

The somewhat vague utterances of Propertius as to his native town seem to show that the position of Assisi, with regard to Perugia and the plain, more nearly coincides with his description than that of any other city in the valley or on the hills. To one inquisitive friend he answers: "Tullus, thou art ever entreating me in the name of our friendship to tell thee my country and my descent. If thou knowest Perusia, which gave a field of death and a sepulchre to our father and in Italy's hour of affliction, when domestic discord drove Rome's own citizens one against the other—(Ah! hills of Etruria, to me beyond measure have ye given sorrow, for ye suffered the limbs of my kinsman to be cast aside unburied, and denied the handful of dust to cover his bones)—there it was that, close above the margin of her plain spread below, Umbria, rich in fertile domains, gave me birth."[1] The kinsman spoken of here is a certain Gallus, who lost his life in B.C. 41, when Lucius Antonius was besieged in Perugia by Augustus. The horrors of the general massacre which followed the fall of the city left sad memories in the mind of Propertius, then a mere child. In the general confiscation of property after the battle of Philippi his family lost their estates. But poor as they were, Propertius was sent to Rome to study, where, recognised as the leader of

[1] *Carmina*, i. 22, translated by R. C. Trevelyan.

a new school of poetry, he remained until shortly before his death, at the age of thirty-five. His paternal estates having been restored to him, he forsook the splendour of the Augustan court, the patronage of Maecenas, the friendship of Virgil, and returned to the Umbrian country where his first inspirations had been awakened. The contrast between a house and garden on the Palatine hill, in the midst of the stir of Roman life, and a farm by the silent stream flowing through the stillest of valleys, must have been great. But, judging from his description of the country, he seems to have fallen readily into rural ways, and loved to watch the herds of white oxen, dedicated to the service of the goddesses, grazing close to the banks of the Clitumnus. We may infer that he hunted the "timorous hare and birds" in the thick oak forest of the Spoletan valley, but, as he playfully tells us, he left "the hazardous boar alone," for physical courage was not one of his characteristics.

From the plain his eyes were often raised in the direction of Assisi, and to his familiarity with her towers we owe this exquisite description of his birthplace, which, perhaps out of modesty, as he alludes to his own fame, he places in the mouth of a soothsayer: "Ancient Umbria gave thee birth from a noted household. Do I mistake, or do I touch rightly the region of your home, where misty Mevania stands among the dews of the hill-girt plain, and the waters of the Umbrian lake grow warm the summer through, and where on the summit of mounting Asis rise the walls to which your genius has added glory." [1]

Nothing happens, or at least nothing is mentioned

[1] *Carmina*, IV. i. 121; translated by R. C. Trevelyan. In another place Propertius gives bolder utterance to his pride: "Whosoever beholds the town climbing the valley side, let him measure the fame of their walls by my genius" (*Carmina*, iv. 5).

in Assisan chronicles until Christianity stealthily worked its way up from Rome about the third century. Then bloodshed followed during a period of darkness when Christians and pagans divided the town into factions by their bitter fights for religion. At first the Christians suffered, and many were martyred in the Umbrian rivers, but only to triumph later when Roman Assisi soon vanished and Christian basilicas were built on the site of pagan temples. Although, after the Roman period, we find Assisi more nearly linked with the general history of Italy, she appears uninfluenced by outside events, and her atmosphere of remoteness remains unimpaired. Thus we may say that Huns, Franks, and Lombards merely passed by and left no lasting mark upon the city. For a moment she was suddenly aroused by the tempestuous arrival of one or other of their leaders, but once the danger was past she returned to her calm sleep upon the mountain side.

In 545 Totila, on his march to Rome, arrived before the walls of Assisi which were gallantly defended for the Emperor Justinian by Siegfried the Goth, but unfortunately he being killed in a skirmish with the Huns, the disheartened citizens reluctantly opened their gates to the enemy. For the first time in her annals (the Roman occupation had been peaceful enough) a foreigner—a tyrant set foot in her streets as master. But the restless Totila soon began to scan the country round for other cities to attack. Becoming aware of the large and wealthy city of Perugia perched upon the western hill, he sallied forth to capture a bigger prey, and Assisi enjoyed a further spell of peace.

In reading the long-winded chronicles it is often difficult to gather to which power the various small towns at this time belonged. One point is, however, clear, that during endless contentions between the Popes and the Greek, and later the German Emperors, the

Umbrian cities were often left to manage their own affairs, and because of the periods of rest which they

THE EASTERN SLOPE OF ASSISI WITH THE CASTLE, FROM THE PORTA CAPPUCCINI

thus enjoyed and used in their individual ways, we are inclined to speak of them as republics. For a long

time Assisi remained annexed to the Duchy of Spoleto, then under the rule of the Lombard Dukes whose advent had filled the different cities in the valley with Arian Christians, unfriendly to the Papacy. Assisi, together with other towns swerved from her allegiance to the Pope, and it is perhaps on this account that Charlemagne in 773 with his "terrible and fierce followers" came to besiege her. They laid the country waste, and made many attacks upon Assisi which met with stout resistance; but while prowling round the walls one night they found the main drain, and stealing through it they were able to discover the weakest part of the town. Next night they returned well armed, slew the guards who were keeping watch by the midnight fires, and before the citizens could rush to arms, the gates were opened to Charlemagne. The army passed in, her citizens were put to the sword, and the town razed to the ground.

"Thus," says a chronicler, "Assisi bereft of her inhabitants, found herself an unhappy widow. Then was the most clement emperor grieved, and ordering that the city should be rebuilt, he placed therein a new colony of Christians of the Roman faith, and the city was restored, and in it the Divine Worship." [1]

A small arched doorway ornamented with a delicate frieze of foliage still remains as a record of the rebuilding of the city by Charlemagne's Lombard workmen. The stone is blackened, the tracery worn away. Few find this dark corner in the Piazza delle Rose, and the people wonder at those who stop to look, for "it is ugly and very old," they say.

It was probably at this time, towards the end of the eighth century, that the Rocca d'Assisi was built. This made her a more important factor in Umbrian

[1] See Cristofani, *Storia d'Assisi*, p. 42 for text of the MS.

politics; and leaders of armies, who hitherto had paid her but a hurried visit, now vied with each other to possess a city with so fair a crown. The citizens had chosen for the site of the castle the part where the hill rises in a sudden peak above the town, looking to the north across a deep ravine towards the mountains of Gualdo and Nocera. Above the main building and the four crenelated towers soared the castle keep; from the ramparts started two lines of walls which, going east and west, gathered the town as it were within a nest. At intervals rose forts connected by a covered passage, and tall towers guarded the walls where they joined the city gates. The Rocca d'Assisi with this chain of walls bristling with iron spikes and towers, complete in strength and perfect in architecture, looked down upon the town like some guarding deity, and was the pride of every citizen. It was no gloomy stronghold such as the French kings erected in the woods of Tourraine, but built of the yellow Subasian stone it seemed more like a mighty palace with windows large and square, whence many a *condottiere* and many a noble prisoner leant out to look upon the splendid sweep of country from Perugia to Spoleto.

Proud as the citizens were of their new-born importance they soon regretted the calmer days of their obscurity. By the twelfth century they were torn between the Pope, the Emperor, and their own turbulent factions, for even in the smaller towns the cries of Guelph and Ghibelline were beginning to be heard. Whenever German potentates—"the abhorred Germans" as the chroniclers call them—had their hands well clenched upon an Umbrian town, the citizens turned imploring eyes towards Rome. The promise of municipal liberty was the bait which every pontiff knew well how to use for his own profit. The German, on the other hand, troubled not to use diplomacy as a

means to gain his ends, but brought an army to storm the town, and took up his residence in the castle, whence he could hear the murmurings of the citizens below planning to drive him out of their gates. The first distinguished but unwelcome guest in the Rocca d'Assisi was Frederick Barbarossa. He was, however, too much occupied in his career of conquest to waste more than a few weeks in Umbria, and in 1195 we find Conrad of Suabia, who in the annals of the time is known by the nickname of "the whimsical one," in charge of the castle, with the title of Count of Assisi. Conrad was also Duke of Spoleto, but he preferred the fortress of Assisi as a residence and spent some two years there to the annoyance of the citizens, who were constrained to be more or less on their good behaviour. With him in those days was a small but important person, who, at the age of two, had been elected King of Germany and Italy. This was Frederick II, and the legend recounts how he was born in the Piazza Minerva beneath a tent hastily erected for the occasion, and in his third year was baptised in the Cathedral of San Rufino, amidst a throng of cardinals, bishops, Assisan priors and nobles. It would, indeed, be strange that he, who later was to prove a thorn in the side of many a Pope, should have been born and nurtured in the Seraphic City.

The Assisans soon wearied of the German yoke, but unaided they could not throw it off and it needed the timely intervention of Innocent III, to rid them of Conrad's presence. The Pope, who had been quietly waiting an opportunity to regain his lost Umbrian towns, felt himself powerful enough now that the Emperor Henry VI, was dead, to send haughty commands to Conrad. He was bidden to meet Innocent at Narni where he solemnly made over his possessions to the Church. Thus left to themselves, the Assisans,

with cries of "Liberty and the Pope," rushed on the castle to tear it down. Built to be their safeguard, it proved their greatest danger, and they determined that no other tyrant should find shelter within its walls. While the Assisans were rejoicing in their freedom, and endeavouring to guard against the constant attacks of the Perugians, the big world outside was being torn and rent by a medley of events which was carrying men's thoughts forward in the swift current of a fresh era. Everywhere a new spirit was spreading—"the fraternising spirit" it has been called. In the cities men were joining together in guilds, heralding the commonwealths; while, in the country, bands of people, under the names of Patarins, Albergenses, Poor Men of Lyons, etc., raised the standard of revolt yet higher against their feudal and spiritual lords. A contemporary writer speaks of thirty-two heresies as being rampant in Italy at this time. Men were eager and full of energy, finding relief through many channels that set all Italy in a ferment. But amidst the confusion of wars and heresies the Papal power grew ever stronger, until, with the accession of Innocent III, the claims of a temporal ruler were blended with spiritual rights. The Marches of Ancona, Umbria, and the seven hills of Rome belonged alike to him, while he was powerful enough to excommunicate cities, kingdoms, and emperors at his pleasure, and rule all with a rod of iron. The magnificent designs planned by Hildebrand seemed to triumph under Innocent, and yet the papal horizon was not without its clouds.

> "Ah Constantine! of how much ill was cause,
> Not thy conversion, but those rich domains
> That the first wealthy Pope received of thee,"[1]

[1] Dante, *Inferno*, xix. p. 115. Translated by John Milton.

groans Dante, in writing of the condition of the Church, and his cry reaches back to the time of which we write. Jacques de Vitry, who was often at the court of Innocent, also speaks with bitterness of the depravity of the priests. They were, he tells us, "deceiving as foxes, proud as bulls, avaricious and insatiable as the minotaur."

Innocent III, though scheming and ambitious, was a man of lofty character, and no one watched with so much anguish the rising storms which threatened to shake the mighty fabric of the Papacy. In a moment of discouragement he is said to have exclaimed that fire and sword were needed to heal the wounds made by the simoniacal priests, and for a long time he in vain sought a remedy for those ills. But salvation was at hand, and it came from the Umbrian mountains, as the fresh breeze comes which suddenly breaks upon the budding trees in springtime.

Within the narrow circuit of the Assisan walls arose a figure of magical power who drew men to him by the charm of his mysticism and the spell of his ardent nature. It is the sweet-souled saint of mediæval Italy —St. Francis of Assisi—who now illuminates this quiet corner of the world.

Francis Bernardone was born in the year 1182, when, as we have seen, the Church was harrowed by a hundred ills. He passed a gay youth, free from every care, and tested all the pleasures that riches could procure. Though the son of a merchant he consorted with the noblest of the Assisan youths, who, partly on account of his father's wealth, partly because of his gaiety and love of splendour, were glad to accept him as an equal. All looked to the high-spirited, gifted Francis as the leader at every feast, the organiser of every entertainment, and when Perugia blew her war-trumpet he rode out to battle side by

side with the Assisan cavaliers. Such, in a few words, was his position in Assisi when in his twenty-second year, after a severe illness which brought him to the brink of the grave, he resolved to follow to the letter the precept of the Gospel and lead the life of the first apostles. So complete was his conversion that he, the rich merchant's son, was to be seen walking through the streets with bricks on his back for the repair of the ruined churches of Assisi, while his former companions drew back and laughed as he passed them. But their derision was of short duration, for the charm they had felt in former days had by no means passed away. Holiness could never make him sad, and in the human tenderness and joyousness of his nature lay the secret of that power which was strong enough, the Assisans soon discovered, to lead them where he would—though it was now by a new road he travelled.

The great movement, which began at Assisi and spread throughout Europe in a very few years, can only be likened to that witnessed by the lake of Galilee. Rich citizens gave all to the poor; the peasants left the vintage and sold their oxen, to join the ever-swelling crowd of bare-footed disciples who wandered through cities and into distant lands bringing comfort and words of peace to all they met. Like a ray of brilliant sunshine St. Francis dispersed the gloom of the middle ages, teaching men that the qualities of mercy and love were to be looked for from God instead of the inflexible justice that had overshadowed a religion intended to be all light. He walked the earth with joyous steps, inviting all to come with him and see how beautiful was the world; he looked upwards, praising God in bursts of eloquent song for the rain that fed the flowers, the birds that sang to him in the woods, and the blueness of his Umbrian sky. How different from the stern, orthodox saints who

passed through the loveliest valleys with downcast eyes for fear of some hidden temptation or of some interruption to their prayers! With such a founder it is hardly surprising that the order of St. Francis spread and multiplied, becoming a great world force, as great and perhaps greater than that of St. Dominic. We get an interesting picture of the change he wrought throughout Italy and of the enthusiasm he kindled among his followers in a letter of Jacques de Vitry; from this we quote at length, for, being written by a contemporary of the saint, its value is very great.

"While I was at the pontifical court I saw many things which grieved me to the heart. Everyone is so preoccupied with secular and temporal things, with matters concerning kings and kingdoms, litigations and lawsuits, that it is almost impossible to talk on religious matters.

"Yet I found one subject for consolation in those lands: in that many persons of either sex, rich, and living in the great world, leave all for the love of Christ and renounce the world. They are called the Friars Minor, and are held in great respect by the Pope and the Cardinals. They, on their part, care nought for things temporal, and strive hard every day to tear perishing souls from the vanities of this world and to entice them into their ranks. Thanks be to God, their labour has already borne fruit, and they have gained many souls: inasmuch as he who listens to them brings others, and thus one audience creates another.

"They live according to the rule of the primitive church, of which it is written: 'The multitude of believers were as one heart and one soul.' In the day they go into the cities and the villages to gain over souls and to work; in the night they betake themselves to hermitages and solitary places and give themselves up to contemplation.

"The women live together near to cities in divers convents; they accept nought, but live by the labour of their hands. They are much disturbed to find themselves held in greater esteem, both by the clergy and the laity, than they themselves desire.

"The men of this order meet once a year in some pre-arranged place, to their great profit, and rejoice together in the Lord and eat in company; and then, with the help of good and honest men, they adopt and promulgate holy institutions, approved by the Pope. After this they disperse, going about in Lombardy, Tuscany, and even in Apulia and Sicily, for the rest of the year. . . . I think it is to put the prelates to shame, who are like dogs unable to bark, that the Lord wills to save many souls before the end of the world, by means of these poor simple friars." [1]

Certainly one of the most remarkable events in mediæval history was the result of the teaching of St. Francis upon his own and future generations. In his native city the strength of his personal influence and the love and veneration which he excited was extraordinary. But we notice even a stranger fact; with his death this holy influence apparently vanished, and it is possible that the memory of the saint is dearer to the hearts of the Assisans in what we are inclined to call the prosaic tedium of our trafficking nineteenth century, than it was in the years immediately following his death. Later centuries have shown us that his teaching and his presence there were not in vain. Assisi, down to our own times, has continued to be the Mecca of thousands of pilgrims. Her churches bear the record of infinite early piety, for when art was in its early prime the most famous masters from

[1] See *Les Nouveaux Mémoires de l'Academie de Bruxelles* (t. xxiii. pp. 29, 33); also *Un nouveau Chapitre de la Vie de S. François d'Assise*, par Paul Sabatier.

Tuscany were called upon to decorate the Franciscan Basilica and leave their choicest treasures there as tributes to the immortal glory of the saint. But the note of war rings louder than the song of praise and love for many years to come in all the Assisan chronicles, and grass and weeds grow up to choke, though not to kill, the blessed seed that Francis sowed and did not live to tend. No sooner did the gates of death close upon that sweet and genial spirit, than war, lust, strife and pestilence burst upon the very people he had so tenderly loved. The story of Assisi becomes, as it had never been before, a list of murders—of struggles to the death for individual power, and of wars which made the fair Umbrian country a desolate and cruel waste for months and even years.

Each town looked with hatred upon its powerful rival, and the communal armies were for ever meeting in the plain by the Tiber to match their strength and see if some small portion at least of a city's domains could not be wrested from her. The bitterest and most pronounced enemies in the valley were undoubtedly Assisi and Perugia. Their feuds date back to the twelfth century; but even before the Christian era these two cities of the hills had marked each other as a foe for the one was Umbrian, the other Etruscan, and they merely continued the rivalry of their founders. It is often difficult to discover the cause of each separate war, but it may, as a general rule, be traced to Perugia's inborn love of fighting, and to her restless spirit which led her to storm each town in turn. From her eyrie she looked straight down upon half the Umbrian country, and gazing daily on so fair a land the desire for possession grew ever stronger. Many towns were forced to submit to her sway, and by the thirteenth century she was the acknowledged mistress of Umbria. It is, therefore, with surprise and admiration that we

watch the undaunted struggle of Assisi against a tyrant whom she hated with a hatred quite Dantesque in its bitterness and strength. Many menacing towers were built on either side of the valley, and heralds were continually sent between the two towns with insulting messages to goad the citizens forward into battle. When Perugia was known to be preparing for an attack upon Assisi, the castles and villages around hastened to break their allegiance to the weaker city and ally themselves with the Perugian griffin. Assisi was thus often obliged to defend herself unaided against the Umbrian tyrant. When, in 1321 Perugia declared war against "this most wicked city of Assisi" whose crime consisted in having fallen under the rule of the Ghibelline party of her citizens,[1] both communes were in need of money as their bellicose habits had proved expensive. Busily, therefore, they set to work about procuring it, and in a highly characteristic manner Perugia sold her right of fishing in Thrasymene for five years, while the citizens of the Seraphic City entered by force into the sacristy of San Francesco and carried off a quantity of sacred spoils. Gold ornaments, censers, chalices, crucifixes of rare workmanship and precious stuffs, were divided into lots and sold, partly to Arezzo for 14,000 golden florins, and partly to Florence for a larger sum. Now these things did not even belong to the Franciscans, but had been carefully stored in the sacristy by the Pope and his cardinals during their last visit to the town. Great, therefore, was the wrath at the Papal Court when news came of the sacrilegious robbery, and without a

[1] Perugia was, on the whole, faithful to the Guelph cause. She was patronised by the Popes on account of her strong position overlooking the Tiber, and when inclined she freely acknowledged them as her masters but at the same time she was careful to guard her independence.

moment's delay a bull of excommunication was fulminated from Avignon. For thirty-eight years Assisi lay under the heavy sentence of an interdict, and, except for the feast of the "Pardon of St. Francis," the church doors were closed and the church bells were silent. But not a whit did the people care for the anger of a distant Pope, and it is related that when the two friars brought the bull of excommunication to Ser Muzio di Francesco, the leader of the robbers, they were flogged within an inch of their lives, and further, they were made to swallow the seals of lead which hung from the Papal document.

The Assisans, having obtained the necessary funds, set to work to defend themselves against the enemy who were to be seen rolling their heavy catapults along the dusty roads. A proud historian says, "they saw without flinching 500 horsemen galloping round their walls," and with a heroism worthy of so good a cause, determined to be buried in the ruins of their city sooner than cede one step to their abhorred enemies the Perugians. They closed the shops, barred the houses and threw the chains across the streets to stop advancing cavalry; every artisan turned soldier, every noble watched from the tower of his palace. Not only were they guarding their own liberties, but they feared for the safety of the body of St. Francis, which the Perugians, ever prowling day and night about the walls, were anxious to carry off. The siege, it is said, lasted a year, when the Assisans were forced to give way and open their gates to the enemy, who sacked the town, "killing more than one hundred of the most wicked citizens, to wit, all those who fought against the city of Perugia." Then came a perilous moment, for many, not content with a barbarous pillage, wished to destroy Assisi altogether. Fortunately a wily Perugian, Massiolo di Buonante, stood up in her defence, arguing that "Assisi

being now in their power, it were better to possess her fortified, and well provided against any new attack of the Ghibelline party."[1] His words had due effect, but still the town suffered horribly, and her walls only lately built were in greater part razed to the ground. The chains that guarded the streets together with the bars and keys of the gates were taken back to Perugia, where, until a century ago, they hung "as glorious trophies" from the claws of the bronze griffon outside the Palazzo Pubblico. Before leaving, the Perugians gave their orders to the now submissive city. The Guelphs were to live within the ancient circle of walls in the upper and more fortified part of the town, while the Ghibellines were left in the undefended suburbs. They further commanded that each year, on the feast of St. Ercolano, the Assisans should bring them a banner "worth at least 25 golden florins, *in signum subjectionis*." This was the greatest ignominy of all, and rankled even more deeply in the hearts of the citizens of Assisi than the fact of their being governed by Perugian officials. The delivery of the yearly tribute was performed in a manner highly characteristic of the times and of the love of petty tyranny and display peculiar to the mediæval towns. An Assisan horseman mounted on a splendidly caparisoned charger brought the hated emblem to lay before the Priors of

THE GUELPH LION OF ASSISI

[1] *Cronaca Graziani*, p. 522.

Perugia, who robed in crimson, with heavy golden chains about their necks, waited at the foot of the campanile of San Lorenzo. Close to them stood four mace bearers and trumpeters with white griffins painted on the red satin streamers which hung from the silver trumpets. Nothing was neglected that would impress her subjects with the dignity of her hill-set city. All the Perugians were assembled, and in their name the Priors promised to defend Assisi against her enemies and to preserve her from the yoke of tyrants. Having uttered this solemn mockery, they gave the Podestà of Assisi a sealed book wherein were written the laws to be observed in return for the inestimable favours granted; the book was not to be opened until he and his retinue had returned to their own city. The spirit of the Assisans was by no means crushed by their misfortunes, and shortly after the events we have just narrated they issued an edict with a pomp worthy of Perugia herself which fairly puzzled the Priors of that city. All Perugians holding land in Assisi were herein ordered to pay the taxes usually demanded of "strangers" possessing property in the territory; further, the Assisans proclaimed their firm determination no longer to observe any orders given to them by the Commune of Perugia. This audacity was, however, soon checked. Perugia issued an order to the effect that these statutes, and these alone, which were decreed by herself were to be valid in Assisi, all others were worthless. Assisi therefore remained subject to Perugia till 1367, when Cardinal Albornoz who was engaged in recovering the allegiance of the Papal States, entered her gates. He was received with wild enthusiasm by the citizens, for they hailed him as their deliverer from the hated yoke of the Perugians. The Assisans had every reason to rejoice in this change of masters, as the Cardinal allowed them to govern their town like a free

republic; he rebuilt the walls destroyed during the last siege, and the castle which had also suffered much from the Perugian soldiery. The people were delighted, and their artists were soon busily employed in painting the gilded arms of the church on gateways and on palaces.

During his brief sojourn in Assisi the war-like Cardinal had found such peace as he had probably not often known before, and such was his love for the church of San Francesco that he added to it several chapels and chose a place for his tomb within its walls. He died at Viterbo; and only five months after the Assisans had welcomed him with such rejoicing, they went with torches and candles, to bear his dead body back to San Francesco, the Priors, says a chronicler, spending 145 florins upon the crimson gowns they bought for this occasion.

Days of peace and liberty were short, and the Assisans were soon groaning beneath the enormous taxes laid upon them by the zealous ministers of the Pope. In 1376 their indignation rose to such a pitch that they broke into open rebellion, and joined in the war-cry against the Church, which was to be heard in other towns of Tuscany and Umbria. The citizens besieged the Legates in their palaces and ordered them with haughty words to depart; so seeing it was safer to obey, they returned to Rome without a word. "Because of their love for the holy Pontiff, whose servants they were, the Assisans used no violence towards them," but having got their way with polite bows accompanied them safely beyond the city gates. But at this time, when all was war and conspiracy, there seemed no chance of a free life again for the people. No sooner had one tyrant been disposed of than another rose to take his place. When news of these events reached the Perugians they thought it a good opportunity to try

and again get possession of the town, accordingly envoys were sent "just to put things in order" as they expressed it; but the Assisans shut the gates of the city in their faces and informed them that in future they intended to manage their own affairs. We cannot say that their endeavours were crowned with success, the nobles fought among themselves, while the mob was ever ready for any kind of novelty. It is related how in the year 1398 the Assisans changed their mind three times in one day as to who should be their lord. "*Evviva* the Church" was the first cry; the second, "*Evviva* the people of Perugia"; and lastly, "*Evviva* Messer Imbroglia," a roving adventurer who alternately fought for the Duke of Milan and the Pope, and finally entered Assisi at the head of a large cavalcade as Captain and Gonfalonier of the city.

In the early centuries Assisi had bravely fought for her independence and held her own fairly well; but in the fourteenth century a sudden whirlwind swept across the country threatening to destroy the last remnant of her freedom. At this time the *condottieri* were busy carving out principalities for themselves, and one after another they marched through the land forcing the towns to bear their yoke. Assisi, not without a sharp struggle, fell a prey to Biordo Michelotti and Braccio Fortebraccio, successive despots of Perugia; and the citizens found themselves for the next twenty years in turn the vassals of Guidantonio of Montefeltro, of Sforza, and of the Pope. In 1442 Perugia was governed, in the name of the Pope, by Niccolò Piccinino, successor to Fortebraccio as the leader of the Bracceschi troops, and consequently a successor to the rivalry with Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan. Assisi, therefore, who had spontaneously given herself to Sforza, preferring the tyranny of strangers to the yoke of Perugia, was not likely to be favourably

looked on by Piccinino, and sooner or later he determined to besiege her. But just at this time Perugia had made peace with all the world, and, delighted with this novel state of things, she rang the great bell of the Commune, lit beacon fires on the hills, and sent a special messenger to Assisi to proclaim the fact. The Assisans, with more courage than discretion, cursed the messenger and those who sent him, saying they had half a mind to kill him. "Return with this message," they cried, "say unto those who sent thee, that they try to wipe us from the face of the earth and then send words of peace. But we will have war and only war." This insulting message was duly delivered to the astonished priors, and that night the beacon fires were extinguished. When news reached Assisi of the vast preparations in Perugia for war, these hasty words were regretted. Luckily Francesco Sforza sent the Assisans a good supply of troops, and every day they hoped for the arrival of his brother Alessandro.

The month that followed was disastrous to Assisi, and the account of the war given us by the Perugian chronicler Graziani who took part in the siege, brings before us vividly the many stages she had to pass through before arriving at the calm, seraphic days of later years.

By the end of October 1442, Niccolò Piccinino, alluded to always as *el Capitano*, arrived in the plain below Assisi with some 20,000 men, and took up his quarters in the Franciscan monastery of San Damiano. His first intention was to take the town by assault, but on surveying the fortifications and walls and the impregnable castle, he deemed it wiser to wait quietly until hunger should have damped the valour of the citizens. Help, however, came to him from another quarter. It is believed that a Franciscan friar, perhaps one of those with whom he lodged at San Damiano,

betrayed to him a way into the town by means of an unused drain.

"On Wednesday, being the 28th day of November, the Captain's people entered Assisi by an underground drain, which, beginning below the smaller fortress towards the Carceri, enters Assisi near the market-place below the castle. There Pazaglia, Riccio da Castello, and Nicolo Brunoro, with more than 300 men-at-arms, had seen to clearing the said sewer and cutting through some iron bars at the exit placed by the Assisans so that none might enter; and Pazaglia and his companions worked so well that they entered with all their people one by one. And when they had entered they emerged inside the walls, and advanced without any noise, holding close to the side of the said walls so as not to be seen, although the darkness of the night was great and drizzling rain was falling. But it happened that one of those within passed by with a lighted torch in his hand, and, hearing and seeing people, said several times: 'Who goes there.' At last answer was made to him: 'Friends, friends.' The bearer of the torch went but a little farther before he began to cry out: 'To arms, to arms. Awake, awake, for the enemy is within.' So a great tumult arose throughout the town. Then Pazaglia and his companions, finding they were discovered, mounted the walls and shouted to those outside: 'Ladders, ladders. Enter, enter.'" [1]

With cries of "Braccio, Braccio," the captain led his men rapidly through the town, burning the gate, killing the citizens, and pillaging every palace as they passed along. When Alessandro Sforza who had stolen into Assisi the night before, "to comfort and encourage the citizens," found that the enemy was within he hurried with a few Assisan notables to take

[1] *Cronaca Graziani*, pp. 512 and 513.

refuge in the castle. From the tower-girt hill he looked down upon the scene of carnage—and what a sight it was as pictured by Graziani!

"The anguish, the noise, and the screams of women and children! God alone knows how fearful a thing it was to see them all dishevelled; some tearing their faces, some beating their breasts, one weeping for a father, one for a son, another for a brother, as, crying with loud voices, they prayed to God for death. . . . But, in truth, these same Assisans did themselves much injury, greatly adding to their own trouble. They might have saved many more of their chattels had they trusted the Perugians, but rather did they trust the strangers, and this to their undoing, for the said strangers deceived them. Thus was proved the truth of that proverb which says: 'The offender never pardons.' Often aforetime had they offended the Commune of Perugia as we have seen. Even at this moment, when its forces were encamped outside Assisi, they constantly stood on their walls and hurled insulting and menacing words at the Perugians, defying and threatening them, whom for this reason peradventure they did not trust. . . . Also on the same day, while the city was being sacked, a multitude of women with their children and goods, took sanctuary in Santa Chiara; and when the captain passed and saw so many women and children sheltered there, he said to the women, especially to the nuns of Santa Chiara, that it was no longer a safe refuge for them, and if they would choose where they wished to go he would send them thither in safety. Then, naming to them all the neighbouring towns, he lastly offered to place them in safety in the city of Perugia. But when they heard the name of Perugia, first the nuns and then the other women replied, 'May Perugia be destroyed by fire.' And when the captain heard this answer, he immedi-

ately cried, 'Pillage, pill ge!' Thus was everything plundered and ruined—the convent with the nuns, the women and the children, and much booty was there. . . ."[1]

Assisi, now the shell of her former self, seemed indeed a city of the dead. Through her deserted streets, running with the blood of the slain, echoed the sound of falling rafters and crumbling palaces, while bon-fires flamed on the piazza fed with the public archives by the destroying Perugians. Across the Tiber were to be seen the unhappy citizens being driven like droves of cattle by their captors up the hill to the city they hated. There the women, with their children clinging round their necks, were sold in the market-place as slaves, and exposed to the cruellest treatment by their masters. Even tiny children of four and five years old were sold; a maiden, we are told, fetched fifteen ducats, and many were bought, sometimes for the love of God, and sometimes as maid-servants. Every day fresh booty was brought in, and the Perugians fought over the gold chalices, missals, and other treasures robbed from churches and convents; but these brought lower prices, for even Perugian consciences seem to have been troubled with scruples, and superstitious fear kept them from buying stolen church property. While the slave market was proceeding amidst the clanging of bells proclaiming the victory, the Priors of Perugia sat in their council hall of the great Palazzo Pubblico discussing how they could bring about the total annihilation of Assisi. The following curious letter was finally written, sealed, and sent to Niccolò Piccinino by five ambassadors who were to tempt him to do the deed with a bribe of 15,000 ducats:

"Your illustrious Signory being well aware how that

[1] *Cronaca Graziani*, p. 513.

city has ever been the scandal of this one, and that now the time has come to take this beam from out of our eyes, we pray and supplicate your illustrious Signory, in the name of this city and of the State, that it may please you to act in such wise that this your city shall never again have reason to fear her; and so, as appears good to all the community, it will be well to raze her to the ground, saving only the churches. And this will be the most singular among other favours that your illustrious Signory has ever done to us."[1]

"Trust in my words and trust in my deeds," replied Piccinino to the bearers of this truly mediæval letter; but, adds the chronicler, he refused his consent to their cowardly scheme for the destruction of the town. It is believed that he was acting upon orders received from Eugenius IV, who appears as the benevolent genius of Assisi, until, as the local historians tell us with rage, the Pope offered to sell them to the Commune of Perugia, when his clemency seems due solely to the fact that the papal coffers were sadly empty. Luckily the Perugians, somewhat in debt owing to the late war, were unable to pay the price, and Assisi thus escaped being given "like a lamb to the butcher," while her enemy missed the chance "of removing that beam from out of her eye."

From this time onward Assisi remained in the possession of the Church, and many of the Popes, touched by the miserable condition of the town, supplied money to rebuild its ruined walls and palaces, and thus induce the citizens to return and inhabit the desolate city. But hardly had the Assisans succeeded in getting back some kind of order and prosperity than new wars appeared to ruffle the onward flow of things. This time the danger came from within, and in Assisi, as

[1] *Cronaca Graziani*, p. 514, note 1.

in so many of the cities of Italy, it was the feud between the nobles themselves that drenched the streets with blood and crushed the struggles of a people whose cries for liberty were now only faintly heard. All sank beneath the heavy hand of the despot. The Perugian citizens were being tyrannised over by the powerful family of the Baglioni, whose name brings up a picture of crime and bloodshed that has hardly been equalled in any town in Italy.[1] In Assisi the balance of power lay between the two families of Fiumi and Nepis, who, in the irregular fashion of the time, alternately ruled the city in opposition to the legal sovereignty of the Papacy. The city was sharply divided into the Upper town, where the Nepis had their palaces near the castle and San Rufino, and the Lower town, inhabited entirely by the Fiumi and their adherents, which clustered round the church of Santa Chiara and down to San Francesco. These two families sought perpetually to outshine each other, and such was the reputation they gained among the people in the country round that even the Perugian chroniclers speak of them as "most cultured and splendid citizens," praising their horsemanship and the magnificence of their dress. So great was the rivalry between the members of the two families Fiumi and Nepis that, when they met in the piazza of Assisi where the nobles often walked in the evening, they would provoke each other with scornful looks and words, and often this was a signal for a skirmish. The *bravi* would gather round them, and in an instant the whole town be roused to arms. After a sharp

[1] For a full account of the Baglioni see the sixteenth-century chronicle of Matarazzo (*Archivio Storico Italiano*, vol. xvi. part ii.), who has immortalised their crimes in classic language; and also *The Story of Perugia* (Mediæval Towns Series, J. M. Dent & Co.).

fight one party was driven to retire to its strongholds in the open country, while the victorious nobles seized the reins of government, and the weary citizens sank beneath the rule of the despots. Assisi presented a most melancholy spectacle at the end of one of these encounters. Most of the dwellings of the exiled nobles lay in ruins, the churches were shut in consequence of the perpetual bloodshed, and the palaces, barred and chained, with the gratings drawn up before the entrance, seemed to be inhabited by no living being. Franciscan friars stole along the streets on their errands of mercy among the distressed citizens, who, besides the horrors of the city feuds, suffered from the pestilence and famine which decimated nearly all the towns of Italy at this period. But this death-like silence within the town was never of long duration. The exiled party, ever on the alert to regain possession of their homes, would creep into the town at some unguarded moment and once more stir a people to fight who were beginning to chafe beneath the irksome rule of the rival despots.

A climax of evils came when, in addition to a hundred other ills, the Baglioni of Perugia took upon themselves to interfere.

In 1494 we find the Fiumi and the Nepis living peaceably in their palaces, dividing the power in Assisi, until at last the hot-headed Fiumi grew weary of the even balance of things, and determined at one stroke to rid themselves of every foe. In open combat they had attempted this and failed, so a treacherous plot was hatched. Jacopo Fiumi, head of the house, and his brother Alessandro, persuaded their friends, the Priors of the city, to prepare a great banquet in the Communal Palace and invite all the members of the rival family to be present. Unarmed, and not dreaming of danger, the Nepis entered the big hall. No sooner had they thrown off their cloaks than the

Fiumi rushed upon them with drawn swords and knives. Angered by such wanton treachery, the citizens drove the murderers from the city; and the Priors, protected by the darkness of the night, fled into the open country to seek a refuge in some neighbouring town.

Now this event, like many others, might have subsided and been followed by a period of peace, only it happened that the Baglioni were allies of the Nepis and ready to avenge them in Assisi. They had, moreover, old scores to settle with Jacopo Fiumi, who, Matarazzo tells us, in pained surprise, "was a most cruel enemy of the house of Baglioni and of every Perugian, and studied day and night how he might injure those of Perugia, so that he was the cause of much trouble to the magnificent house of Baglioni."[1] This was therefore a good opportunity for the Baglioni to lay siege to Assisi, and perpetual skirmishes took place in the plain, which sapped the life-blood of the citizens and laid waste the Umbrian country for many miles around. The peasants, whose grain had been trampled down by the Baglioni, were driven half-naked into the woods, and watched the high roads from the heights above Assisi like birds of prey, swooping down to rob or kill travellers passing by. Badgers, wolves, and foxes roamed unmolested in the plain, and fed upon the unburied bodies of the murdered travellers and of those who fell in battle; while, in the dead of night, the friars of the Portiuncula stole out to bury what bones the wild beasts had left. Things had come to such a pass that the Assisans, as we are told, knew not what to say or do, so many of their number were dead or taken captive and the enemy was ever at their gates. Giovan Paolo, mounted on his black charger, "which did not run but flew," led the Perugians to

[1] *Cronaca Matarazzo*, p. 75.

storm the town and draw the citizens out to battle. He was one of the fiercest of the Baglioni brood and a famous soldier, and yet it was in vain he sought to inspire the Assisans with fear. "Indeed," says Matarazzo, "each one proved himself valiant on either side; for the Assisans had become warlike and inured to arms, and they were all iniquitous and desperate."[1] The foes were of equal strength and courage, and the war, which had already lasted three years, seemed likely to have no end. But one day the Assisans, watching from their ramparts, saw a large squadron of soldiers hurrying from Perugia to the aid of the Baglioni, and they began to ring the city bells as a signal that the moment had come for the final stand. Those who were skirmishing in the plain against Giovan Paolo began to lose heart when they heard the clanging of the bells, and the Perugians, perceiving their advantage, took new courage, so that "each one became as a lion." More than sixty Assisans were slain that day, while the prisoners suffered cruelly under the vengeance of those who took this opportunity of remembering offences of past years. "And thus did his lordship, the magnificent Giovan Paolo, return victorious and joyful from this great and dangerous battle."[2]

Once the gates of Assisi were forced open, the Baglioni and their *bravi* scoured the streets from end to end, killing all they encountered, and dragging from the churches the poor women who sought shelter and protection. The blood-thirsty brood did not even respect the Church of San Francesco; and the friars, in a letter to their patron Guidobaldo, Duke of Urbino, complain most bitterly of the crimes committed within the sacred edifice, even on the very

[1] *Cronaca Matarazzo*, p. 75.
[2] *Ibid.*

steps of the altar. "The poor city of Assisi," the letter says, "has known only sorrow through the perpetual raids of the Baglioni, whose many crimes would be condemned even by the infidel Turks. They rebel against the holy Pontiff, and such is their ferocity that they have set fire to the gates of the city—even unto that of the Basilica of San Francesco. They do not shudder to murder men, cook their flesh, and give it to the relations of the slain to eat in their prison dungeons."[1] Matarazzo also dwells on the sad conditions of Assisi during her final struggle for independence. "So great was the pestilence and the famine within the walls that human tongue could not describe it, for great woe there was, and such scarcity and penury in Assisi as had never been known. I myself have talked to men who were in Assisi at that time, and who, on remembering those days of famine, pestilence, and war were bathed in tears; and, if the subject had come up a thousand times in a day, a thousand times would they have wept bitterly, so dark was the memory thereof. Not only did they weep, but those also who listened to them, for they would recount how they wandered by the walls of the town, and down to the hamlets, and in every place searching for herbs to eat; and how, forced by hunger, they ate all manner of cooked herbs, and many people sustained themselves with three or four cooked nuts dipped in wine, and with this they made good cheer."[2]

In reading the terrible chronicle of these years, one asks, "How did any life survive in the face of such ghastly suffering?" The strange fact remains that life not only survived, but that the Assisans even flourished during the period, and, like half-drowned birds, who, rising to the surface, bask for a while in the sunshine and

[1] Fratini. *Storia della Basilica di San Francesco*, p. 287.
[2] *Cronaca di Matarazzo*, p. 75.

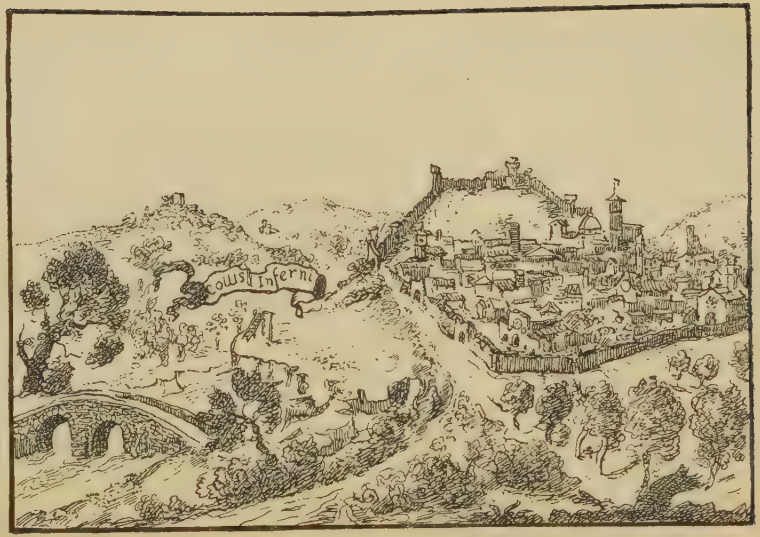
then spread their wings for a fresh flight, they too arose and prospered. But the time was drawing near when these continual efforts were no longer needed. The rival factions had reached the summit of their savage strength, and the city despots were soon to be swept from the land by the whirlwind they themselves had raised.

In the year 1500, during one awful night of carnage at Perugia, the Baglioni were nearly all murdered through the treachery of some of their own family. The manner in which the clansmen sought out their victims and stabbed them in their sleep, driving their teeth into their hearts in savage fury, sent a thrill of horror throughout Italy. The downfall of this powerful house affected the destiny of Assisi, for Perugia was brought under the immediate dominion of the church, and with the advent of Paul III, she lost her independence, which she never again recovered. A mighty fortress was erected on the site of the Baglioni palaces, and the significant words "*Ad coercendam Perusinorum audacam*" were inscribed upon its walls. The Farnese Pope meant to warn, not only the citizens of that proud city which he had brought so successfully within his net, but also the Assisans and the other Umbrians who, with anxious eyes, were watching the storms that wrecked Perugia.

With this new order of things the last flicker of mediæval liberty was being extinguished, and when Paul III, ordered the cannons from the castle of Assisi to be transferred to his new fortress at Perugia, the Assisans felt that a crisis had been reached and that henceforth they must be guided by the menacing finger of an indomitable pontiff. One last effort she did indeed make to save her dignity: she begged to be governed independently of her old rival Perugia. To this the Pope agreed, and a Papal Legate came with

great pomp and was met outside the gates by the Priors, nobles, and citizens of Assisi. With that great Farnese fortress looming in the distance they were forced to make some show of gladness as they followed him in solemn procession through the town and up the steep hill to the Rocca Maggiore. Here the Legate walked round the ramparts and through the spacious halls of the castle, taking possession of all in the name of the Church of Rome. Then the Castellano knelt down before him, and as he handed the keys over to his keeping, the history of war and strife in Assisi abruptly closed.

THE·ARMS·OF
ASSISI



ASSISI IN THE TIME OF ST. FRANCIS

CHAPTER II

The Umbrian Prophet

"Fra santi il pui santo, e tra i peccatori quasi uno di loro."—Celano. *Vita.* I. cap. xxix.

OFTEN while reading the Italian chroniclers we forget that a life of chivalry, song, tournament, and pagan pleasure-making was passed in a mediæval town even while war, pestilence, and famine cast a settled gloom on every home. Lazar-houses stood at the gates of the city while sumptuous feasts were spread in the banqueting halls of palaces. Men rebelled against the ugliness and squalor produced by a hundred ills that swept over Italy during the twelfth century,[1] and so it came about that in the darkest hours of a city's history, scenes of maddest revelry were enacted. At this period were founded the Brigate Amorose, or Com-

[1] For a true picture of the condition of Italian towns, torn by strife, decimated by famine, and suffering from leprosy brought by the crusaders, see Brewer's admirable preface in vol. iv. of the *Monumenta Franciscana.*

panies of young nobles, whose one aim in life was amusement. There were few towns in Italy, however small, in which these gay youths did not organise magnificent sports and tournaments[1] to which the ladies came in gowns of rich brocades or "fair velvet," their tresses garlanded with precious jewels and flowers. Or knights, ladies, and other folk would meet in the piazzas and pass the summer evenings with

"Provençal songs and dances that surpass;
And quaint French mummings: and through hollow brass
A sound of German music in the air."[2]

Late at night after a splendid banquet, the nobles wandered through the streets singing as they followed the lead of one chosen by themselves, whom they called the Lord of Love. Sometimes their ranks were swelled by passing troubadours from Provence who sang of the feats of Charlemagne and of King Arthur and his knights. For it was the time when Bernard de Ventadour was singing some of his sweetest love lyrics, and people were alternately laughing at the whimsicalities of Pierre Vidal and weeping at the tender pathos of his poems.[3] Those who listened to these songsters were, for the moment, deceived into thinking life was full of love and mirth, and sorrow only touched them when their lady frowned. The music of Provence found a way across the Alps to the feudal courts of Este and Ferrara, to Verona, and later, southwards to Sicily, where Frederick the Great was king. It came even to the towns which lay hidden in the folds of the Umbrian mountains, and some of its sweetest

[1] The first tournament took place at Bologna in 1147.

[2] Folgore di San Gimignano, translated by D. G. Rossetti.

[3] These were the first troubadours to visit the Italian courts, driven from Provence by the crusades against the Albigenses.

strains were echoed back again from Assisi. Her troubadour was Francis Bernardone, the rich merchant's son, leader of the young nobles who, in their carousals, named him Lord of Love, and placed the kingly sceptre in his hand as he walked at their head through the streets at night, rousing the sleepy Assisan burghers with wild bursts of song.

Francis had learned the Provençal language from his mother, Madonna Pica, whom Pietro Bernardone[1] is said to have met while journeying from castle to castle in Provence, tempting the ladies to buy his merchandise as he told them news of Italy. The early writers do not mention her nationality, they only allude to her as *Madonna*, which might imply that she was of noble birth; the later legend, which says that she was of the family of the counts of Bourlemont, is without foundation. We know she was a good and tender mother to Francis, who was left mostly in her charge, as Pietro Bernardone was so often absent in France. She taught him to love the world of romance and chivalry peopled by the heroes of the troubadours, and there he found an escape from the gloom that enveloped Assisi during those early days of warfare which were enough to sadden that joyous nature rarely found among saints. Celano gives a graphic picture of the temptations to which the youths of the middle ages were exposed, even in infancy in their own homes. This danger Francis escaped, but the companions with whom he spent the first twenty years of his life in gay living had not been so well guarded, and Francis was not slow to

[1] A certain Bernardo Moriconi, leaving his brother to carry on the business at Lucca, then famous for its manufacture of silk stuffs, came and settled at Assisi where he got the nickname Bernardone—the big Bernard. Whether in allusion to his person or to his prosperity, we cannot say, but the family name was lost sight of and his son was known as Pietro Bernardone.

feel the influence of his time. We must remember that the accounts we have of him were written under the papal eye, and it is patent that both as sinner and as saint he took a leading part.

"He was always first among his equals in all vanities," says Celano, "the first instigator of evil, and behind none in foolishness, so that he drew upon himself the attention of the public by vain-glorious extravagance, in which he stood foremost. He was not chary of jokes, ridicule, light sayings, evil-speaking, singing, and in the wearing of soft and fine clothes; being very rich he spent freely, being less desirous of accumulating wealth than of dissipating his substance; clever at trafficking, but too vain to prevent others from spending what was his: withal a man of pleasant manners, facile and courteous even to his own disadvantage; for this reason, therefore, many, through his fault, became evil-doers and promoters of scandal. Thus, surrounded by many worthless companions, triumphantly and scornfully he went upon his way." [1]

His early years passed away in feasting and singing with an occasional journey to a neighbouring town to sell the Bernardone wares, until 1202 when war broke out between Perugia and Assisi, and the big bell of the cathedral called the citizens to arms in the Piazza della Minerva. Men gathered round their captain, while from the windows of every house women gesticulated wildly, almost drowning the clank of armour and the tramp of horses by their shrill screams. Francis, on a magnificent charger, rode out of the city gates abreast with the nobles of Assisi, filling the bourgeois heart of Pietro with delight, that a son of his should be thus honoured. It was a beautiful sight to see the communal armies winding down to the plain, one coming from the western hill, the other from the southern, to

[1] Celano. *Vita* I. cap. 1.

match their strength by the Tiber. They were "troops of knights, noble in face and form, dazzling in crest and shield; horse and man one labyrinth of quaint colour and gleaming light—the purple, and silver, and scarlet fringes flowing over the strong limbs and clashing mail like sea waves over rocks at sunset." [1]

The Assisans were vanquished: no details of the fight have come down to us, but we know that the nobles lay in a Perugian prison for a year and that it was Francis who cheered them, often astonishing them with his wild spirits. They told him he was mad to dance so gaily in a prison, but nothing saddened him in those days.

When peace was at last made, with hard terms for Assisi, the prisoners returned home and threw themselves with renewed vigour into their former pursuit of pleasure, and soon afterwards Francis fell ill of a fever which brought him near the grave. Face to face with death he stood a while, and the result of the danger he had passed through worked an extraordinary change in his nature. His recovery was in reality a return to a new life, both of body and soul. Celano tells us that Francis "being somewhat stronger and able to walk about the house leaning on a stick, in order to complete his restoration to health one day went forth and with unusual eagerness gazed at the vast extent of country which lay before him; yet neither the charm of the vineyards or of aught that is pleasant to look on, were of any consolation to him." [2]

It was probably from the Porta Nuova, close to where the church of Santa Chiara now stands, that he looked out on the Umbrian country he loved so well. Here Mount Subasio rises grey and bleak above the olive groves which slope gradually down to the valley

[1] Ruskin. *The two paths*: Lecture III.
[2] Celano. *Vita* I. cap. 2.

where a white road leads past Spello to Foligno in the plain and on to Spoleto high up in the mountain gorge which brings the valley to a close. All these towns were dear and familiar to Francis. He had watched them in spring time when the young corn was ripening near their walls and the children came out to look for the sweet scented narcissi. While wandering on the hill sides at dawn he had seen the brown roofs warmed by the first rays of the sun and each window twinkle like so many eyes across the plain in answer to the light. But as he looked now upon the same scene a great sadness came over him, and we are told he wondered at the sudden inward change. That hour in the smiling Umbrian landscape was the most solitary he ever experienced; ill and weak he awoke to the emptiness of the life he had hitherto led, and in the bitterness of his soul he did not know where to turn for comfort.[1]

It is a remarkable fact that Celano does not from this moment picture Francis as an aureoled saint, but allows us to realise the many difficulties he had to overcome before he stands once more among the vineyards with a song of praise upon his lips, and a look of victory in his eyes.

Although Francis began to "despise those things he had formerly held dear," he was not altogether freed from the bonds of vanity, nor had he "thrown off the yoke of servitude"; for when restored to health he was full of ambitious projects to make a great career for himself in the world. The realisation of his dreams seemed indeed near, as it happened at this time that a noble knight of Assisi was preparing to join the army

[1] "Le vide lamentable de sa vie lui était tout à coup apparu; il était effrayé de cette solitude d'une grande âme, dans laquelle il n'y a point d'autel." Paul Sabatier. *Vie de S. François d'Assise*, p. 17

of Gauthier de Brienne, then fighting the battles of Pope Innocent III, in Apulia. Francis, "greedy of glory," determined to accompany the knight to the wars, and began to prepare for the journey with more than usual magnificence. He was all impatience to start, and his mind was full of the expedition when he had a dream which filled him with hope. In lieu of the bales of silk in his father's warehouse, stood saddles, shields, and lances, all marked with the red cross, and as he marvelled at the sight a voice told him those arms were intended for himself and his soldiers. Rising next morning full of ambitious plans after such an omen of good fortune, he mounted his charger and rode through the town bidding farewell to his friends. He smiled on all and seemed so light of heart that they pressed round asking what made him so merry. "I shall yet be a great prince," he answered, and he passed out of the Porta Nuova, where but a short while before he had stood looking down so sadly on the valley he was now to traverse as an armoured knight. At Spoleto he had a return of intermittent fever, and while chafing at the delay a voice called to him: "Francis, who can do the most good, the master or the servant?"

"The master," answered Francis, not in the least astonished by the mysterious question.

"Why then dost thou leave the master for the servant, and the prince for the follower? Return to thy country, there shalt thou be told what to do; for thou hast mistaken the meaning and wrongly interpreted the vision sent thee by God."

Next morning, leaving the knight to continue the journey alone, he mounted his horse and returned to Assisi, where he was doubtless received with disappointment by his parents, and with gibes by the citizens who had listened to his boasts of future greatness. Once

again he went back to work in his father's shop, but now when the young nobles called to him to join in their revels he went listlessly, often escaping from their midst to wander alone in the fields or pass long hours praying in a grotto near the city. One day his friends, in despair at his frequent absences, gave a grand banquet, making him "King of the feast." He delighted them all with fitful bursts of merry wit, but at last when the revellers rushed out into the night to roam about the town till dawn, Francis fell back from the gay throng, and stood gazing up at the calm Umbrian sky decked in all its splendour of myriad stars. When the others returned in search of their leader, they, wondering at the change that had come over the wildest spirit of Assisi, assailed him with questions. "Are you thinking of marrying, Francis," cried one jester, and amidst the laughter of all came his quiet answer: "Yes, a wife more noble and more beautiful than ye have ever seen; she will outshine all others in beauty and in wisdom." Already the image of the Lady Poverty had visited him, and enamoured like a very troubadour he composed songs in her honour as he walked in the woods near Assisi.

The kind heart of Francis had always been touched at the sight of the poor lepers, who, exiled from the companionship of their fellow creatures, lived in a lazar-house on the plain, about a mile from the town. But his compassion for their misery was mingled with a strong feeling of repugnance, so that he had always shunned these wretched outcasts. "When I was in the bondage of sin," he tells us in his will, "it was bitter to me, and loathsome to see, and loke uppon persouny enfect with leopre; but that blessed Lord broughte me amonge them, and I did mercy with them, and departing from them, what before semyd bittre and lothesomme was turned and changed to me in great sweetnesse and com-

fort both of body and of soule, and afterwards in this state I stode and abode a lytle while, and then I lefte and forsooke the worldly lyf."[1]

Pietro Bernardone now saw his son, clothed in rags, his face pinched and white from long vigils spent in prayer, going forth on errands of mercy, jeered at by the citizens, pelted with stones and filth by the children. There were many storms in the Bernardone household which the gentle Pica was unable to quell; and when finally Francis began to throw his father's money among the poor in the same regal manner in which he had once spent it among his boon companions, Bernardone could bear it no longer, and drove his son from the house. When they met he cursed him, and the family bonds thus severed were never again renewed.

Francis was still like a pilgrim uncertain of his goal, or like a man standing before a heavy burden which he feels unable to lift. What was he to do with his life—how could he help the poor and suffering—were questions he asked himself over and over again as he vainly sought for an anchor in the troubled seas. The answer came to him one day as he was attending mass at the chapel of the Portiuncula on the feast of St. Matthew the apostle, in the year 1209.

"And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves" . . . read the priest from the gospel of the day. Those simple words were a revelation to Francis, who, when mass was over,

[1] From a 15th century translation of the will of St. Francis. See *Monumenta Franciscana*. Chronicles edited by J. S. Brewer vol. iv. p. 562.

ran out into the woods, and, with only the birds in the oak trees to witness his strange interpretation of the gospel, threw away his shoes, wallet, staff and well-filled purse. "This is what I desired; behold, here is what I searched for and am burning to perform," he cried, in the delirium of his new-found joy.

If the Assisans had been astonished at his former eccentricities, as they termed his deeds of charity, they were yet more amazed to see him now, clothed in a coarse habit, with a knotted cord round his waist, and with bare feet, begging his bread from door to door. After a little while they grew accustomed to the hurrying figure of the young mendicant as he passed rapidly down the street greeting all he met with the salutation of "Our Lord give thee His peace." The words brought something new and strange into men's hearts, and those who had scoffed at him most drew near to learn the secret of their charm. The first to be touched by the simplicity and joyous saintliness of Francis was Bernardo di Quintevalle, a wealthy noble of Assisi, who had known him as King among the young Assisan revellers, and watched with astonishment his complete renouncement of the world. He determined to join Francis in ministering to the lepers, and began his new mode of life by selling all his possessions for the benefit of the poor. His conversion created a considerable stir in the town; and people had not ceased to gossip on the subject when another well-known citizen, Pietro de Catanio, a canon of the cathedral, also offered his services at the lazar-house. A few days later a labourer named Egidio "beholding how those noble knights of Assisi despised the world, so that the whole country stood amazed," came in search of Francis to beg him to take him as one of his companions. Francis met him at the entrance of the wood by the lazar hos-

pital, and gazing on the devout aspect of Egidio, answered and said: "Brother most dear, God has shown Himself exceeding gracious unto thee. If the Emperor were to come to Assisi and desire to make a certain citizen his knight or private chamberlain, ought not such a one to be exceeding glad? How much more oughtest thou not to rejoice that God hath chosen thee out to be His knight and well-beloved servant, to 'observe the perfection of the Holy Gospel"?[1] and, taking him by the hand, he brought him to the hut which was their home. Here a merchant's son, a learned churchman, and a rich nobleman, welcomed an Assisan labourer in their midst with the simple brotherly love which was to be the keynote of the franciscan order. After the reception of Egidio we are told that Francis went with him to the Marches of Ancona, "singing glorious praises of the Lord of heaven and earth" as they travelled along the dusty roads. Albeit Francis did not preach publicly to the people, yet as he went by the way he admonished and corrected the men-folk and the women-folk, saying lovingly to them these simple words: "Love and fear God, and do fit penance for your sins." And Egidio would say: "Do what this my spiritual Father saith unto you, for he speaketh right well."

It was not long before the fame of Francis drew quite a little community of brethren to the tiny hut in the plain, and the question naturally occurs—Did Francis plan out the creation of an order when he gathered men around him? It was so natural a thing for disciples to follow him that his biographers simply note it as a fact, and, not being given to speculation in those days, pass on to other events. We may be allowed to conjecture that the same ambition which some years before had stirred his longing to be a great

[1] Life of Beato Egidio in the *Little Flowers of St. Francis*.

prince was not dead, only his dreams were to be realised in another sphere of action. The qualities which made him the brilliant leader among the gay nobles of Assisi were now turned into another channel —he became a prince among saints, a controller of men's destinies.

Varied indeed was the band of Francis' disciples, and it is interesting to see how each one was allowed to follow the bent of his nature. In this complete sympathy with character lay one of the secrets of his power. Egidio, who in the world had been a labourer, was encouraged by his master to continue his life in the open country. He gathered in the olives for the peasants, helped them with their vintage, and when the corn was being cut would glean the ears; but if anyone offered him a handful of grain, he remarked: "My brother, I have no granary wherein to store it." Usually he gave away what he had gleaned to the poor, so that he brought little food back to the convent. Always ready to turn his hand to every job, one day we find Egidio beating a walnut tree for a proprietor who could find none to do the work because the tree was so tall. But he set himself gaily to the task, and having made the sign of the Cross, "with great fear climbed up the walnut tree and beat it. The share that fell to him was so large that he could not carry it in his tunic, so taking off his habit he tied the sleeves and the hood together and made a sack of it."[1] With this load on his back he returned towards the convent, but on the way distributed all the nuts to the poor. Egidio remains the ideal type of the franciscan friar. "He is a Knight of my Round Table," said Francis one day as he recounted some new adventure which had befallen the intrepid brother, who was always journey-

[1] Life of Beato Egidio in the *Little Flowers of St. Francis*

ing to some southern town, and is said even to have visited the Holy Land.[1]

A very different man, drawn by the magic influence of Francis into the Order at the beginning of its fame in 1211, was Elias Buonbarone, the son of a Bolognese mattress-maker who had for some time been settled in Assisi. He is always represented by the biographers as haughty, overbearing, and fond of controlling the actions of others; in fact a strong contrast to the meek brother Leo whom Francis lovingly named the little lamb of God. But if lacking in saintly qualities, Elias possessed a remarkable mind and determination of character which enabled him afterwards to play a considerable part in the history of his times. He embodies the later franciscan spirit which grew up after the saint's death, and of which we shall treat in another chapter.

When Francis found himself surrounded by some dozen followers, all anxious to obey his wishes to the very letter and waiting only to be sent hither and thither as he commanded, it became necessary to write down some rule of life. In simple words he enjoined all to live according to the precepts of the Gospel, "and they that came to reseyve this forme or manner of lyvynge departyd and distributed that they had and myght haue too powre people. And we were content with oone coote pesyd bothe within forthe and without forthe with oone corde and a femorall, and we wolde

[1] One of the most beautiful stories in the *Fioretti* (chapter xxxiv.) recounts how St. Louis, King of France, visited Beato Egidio at Perugia. The king and the poor friar kneeling together in the courtyard of the convent, embracing each other like familiar friends, is a picture such as only Umbrian literature could have left us. There was absolute silence between the two. yet we are told St Louis returned to his kingdom and Egidio to his cell with "marvellous content and consolation" in their souls.

not haue ony more. Our dyvyne servyse the clerkis saide as other clerkis, and the lay bretherne said ther Pater noster. And we fulle gladly dwelt and taried in pour deserte and desolat churchys, and we were contente to be taken as ideotis and foolys of every man, and I did exercyse my self in bodily laboure. And I wille laboure, and yt ys my wille surely and steadfastely that alle the bretherne occupie and exercyse themself in laboure, and in such occupation and laboure as belongeth to honeste. And those that have no occupation to exercyse themself with alle, shall lerne not for covetis to resceyve the price or hier for their laboure, but for to give good example and eschewe and put away idlenesse. When we wer not satisfied nor recompensied for our laboure, we went and had recourse to the lord of oure Lorde, askynge almes from dore to dore. Our Lorde by revalation tawghte me to say this maner of salutation, 'Our Lorde give to thee His peace.'" [1]

The first rule which Francis and his companions took in the summer of 1210 to be confirmed by Innocent III, has not come down to us. In Rome they fortunately met the bishop of Assisi, who promised to obtain for them, through one of the Cardinals, an interview with the Pope. A legend tells us how Innocent, wrapt in deep meditation, was pacing with solemn step the terrace of the Lateran, when this strange company of ragged, bare-footed, dusty men was ushered into his presence. He looked at them in surprise, his lip curling in disdain as Francis stepped forward to make his request. From an Umbrian pilgrim he heard for the first time that power was not the greatest good in life while in poverty lay both peace and joy, and the great pope stood amazed at the new doctrine. "Who can live without temporal possessions," sarcastically

[1] See *Supra*, p. 47.

asked the Cardinals who had been trained in the spirit of Innocent, and the "Penitents of Assisi" bowed their heads, and drawing their hoods forward, went sorrowfully out of the pope's presence amid the jeers of his court. That night Innocent had a dream in which he saw the church of St John Lateran about to fall, and its tottering walls were supported on the shoulders of a man whom he recognised as the spokesman of the band of Umbrians he had so hastily dismissed. Full of strange visions the pope sent for Francis, who repeated his desire to have his rule confirmed. "My son," said Innocent, "your rule of life seems to us most hard and bitter, but although we do not doubt your fervour we must consider whether the road is not too hard a one for those who are to follow thee." Francis, with ready wit, answered these objections by a tale he invented for the purpose. "A beautiful but poor girl lived in a desert, and a great king, seeing her beauty, wished to take her to wife, thinking by her to have fine children. The marriage having taken place, many sons were born, and when they were grown up their mother thus spoke to them: 'My sons be not ashamed, for you are sons of the king; go therefore to his court and he will cause all that is needful to be given to you.' And when they came, the king, observing their beauty and seeing in them his own likeness and image, said: 'Whose sons are you?' And they answered; 'sons of a poor woman who lived in the desert.' So with great joy the king embraced them, saying: Be not afraid, for you are my sons, and when strangers eat at my table how much more right have you to eat who are my legitimate sons?' The king then ordered the said woman to send all sons born of her to be nourished at his court." "Oh, Messer," cried Francis, "I am that poor woman, beloved of God, and made beautiful through His mercy, by whom

he was pleased to generate legitimate sons. And the King said to me that he will feed all the sons born of me, for as He feeds strangers so He may well feed His own."

Thus did Francis describe his Lady Poverty, and boldly hint that the crimson-robed princes of the Church and the prelates of the Papal Court had strayed from the teaching of the Gospel.

Who can say whether Innocent, watching with keen eyes the earnest face of the Umbrian teacher, began to realise the power such a man might have in restoring to the church some of its lost purity, and was planning how to yoke him to his service. This at least we know, that before Francis and his companions left Rome they received the tonsure which marked them as the Church's own, and with blessings and promises of protection Innocent sent this new and strange militia throughout the length and breadth of Italy to fight his spiritual battles. The simplicity and the love of Francis had conquered the Pope, and to the end continued to triumph over every difficulty.

Such was the desire of Francis and his companions to return to Assisi with the good news, that they forgot to eat on the way and arrived exhausted in the valley of Spoleto, though still singing aloud for the joy in their hearts. Somewhere near Orte they found an Etruscan tomb—a delightful retreat for prayer. It so pleased Francis that a strong temptation came over him to abandon all idea of preaching and lead a hermit's life. For there was that in his nature which drew him into the deep solitude of the woods, and might have kept him away from men and the work that was before him. The battle in his soul waged fiercely as he stood upon the mountain side looking up the valley towards Assisi, but his heart went out to the people who dwelt there, and the strong impulse he had to help

those who suffered and needed him won the day. The die was cast; he left his Etruscan retreat to take up once more the burden, and thus it was that, in the words of Matthew Arnold: "He brought religion to the people. He founded the most popular body of ministers of religion that has ever existed in the church. He transformed monachism by uprooting the stationary monk, delivering him from the bondage of property, and sending him, as a medicant friar, to be a stranger and sojourner; not in the wilderness, but in the most crowded haunts of men, to console them, and to do them good."

When Francis began his mission among the people of Italy it was the custom for only the bishops to preach; but as they lived in baronial splendour, enjoying the present, and amassing money which they extorted from their poor parishioners to leave to their families, they had little time to attend to spiritual duties. The people being therefore left much to their own devices, sank ever deeper into ignorance, sin, and superstition. They saw religion only from afar until Francis appeared "like a star shining in the darkness of the night" to bring to them the messages of peace and love. He came as one of themselves, poor, reviled and persecuted, and the wonder of it made the people throng in crowds to hear one who seemed indeed inspired. Those simple words from the depths of a great and noble heart filled all who listened with wonder. They were like the sharp cries of some wild bird calling to its mate—the people heard and understood them. When the citizens of an Umbrian town looked from their walls across the valley and saw the grey cloaked figure hurrying along the dusty road, they rang the bells to spread the good news, and bearing branches of olive went out singing to meet him. All turned out of their houses to run to the market-place where Francis, standing on steps, or

upon a low wall, for he was short of stature, would speak to them as one friend does to another; sometimes charming them by his eloquence, often moving the whole multitude to bitter tears by his preaching on the passion of Christ. With his eyes looking up to the heavens, and his hands outstretched as though imploring them to repent, he seemed to belong to another world and "not to this century." They not only repented, but many left the world to follow him and spread the gospel of peace and love. The first woman who begged him to receive her vows of renunciation was Chiara Sciffi, of a noble Assisan house. Several members of the family, besides others from near and far, followed her into the cloister until she became the abbess of a numerous sisterhood, the foundress of the Poor Clares or Second Order of St. Francis.

The first inspired messages of Francis were brought to the Assisans, and then he left them for awhile to journey further afield into other parts of Italy, where he always met with the same marvellous success. In the following account of his visit to Bologna we get a vivid idea of his manner of appeal to the people; and of their enthusiasm and astonishment that this poor and seemingly illiterate man, the very antithesis of the pedantic clergy, should have the power to hold and sway an audience by the magic of his words. "I, Thomas, citizen of Spalato, and archdeacon of the cathedral church of the same city, studying at Bologna in the year 1220, on the day of the assumption of the Mother of God, saw St. Francis preach in the square before the little palace, where nearly the whole town was assembled. He spoke first of angels, of men, and of devils. He explained the spiritual natures with such exactness and eloquence that his hearers were astonished that such words could come from the mouth of a man so simple as he was. Nor did he follow the

usual course of preachers. His discourse resembled rather one of those harangues that are made by popular orators. At the conclusion, he spoke only of the extinction of hatred, and the urgency of concluding treaties of peace, and compacts of union. His garments were soiled and torn, his person thin, his face pale, but God gave his words unheard-of power. He converted even men of rank, whose unrestrained fury and cruelty had bathed the country in blood; many who were enemies were reconciled. Love and veneration for the saint were universal; men and women thronged around him, and happy were those who could so much as touch the hem of his habit." [1]

Young knights and students stepped out of the crowd after one of these burning discourses, resolved to don the grey habit and renounce the world. The ranks of the followers of St. Francis were swelled at every town through which he passed; and he left some of his own sweetness and gentleness among those who had listened to his preaching, so that party feuds lay dormant for awhile, enemies were reconciled, and all tried to lead more Christian lives. *Pax et bonum* was the Franciscan war-cry which fell indeed strangely on the air in a mediœval town. Whenever Francis heard of tension and ill-will between the nobles and the people he hurried with his message of peace to quell the storm.

But at Perugia he failed. Brother Leo tells us that, "Once upon a time, when the Blessed Francis was preaching to a great multitude of people gathered together in the Piazza of Perugia, some cavaliers of the city began to joust and play on their horses in the piazza, thus interrupting his sermon; and, although rebuked by those present, they would not desist. Then

[1] Quoted by Sigonius in his work on the Bishops of Bologna. *Opera omnia*, v. iii., translated by Canon Knox Little. *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, p. 179.

the blessed Francis, in the fervour of his soul, turned towards them and said, 'Listen and understand what the Lord announces to you by me, his little servant, and refrain from jeering at him, and saying, He is an Assisan.' This he said because of the ancient hatred which still exists between the Perugians and the Assisans. . . ."[1] Rebuking the citizens for their pride, he predicted that if they did not shortly repent civil war would break out in the city. But the Perugians, who fought ever better than they prayed, continued in their evil ways until at length the words of St Francis were verified. A tumult arose between the people of Perugia, and the soldiers were thrust out of the city gates into the country, which they devastated, destroying trees, vineyards, and corn-fields, so that the misery in the land was great.

VIA DI S. MARIA DELLE ROSE

In the course of a single day Francis often preached at five different towns or villages; sometimes he went up to a feudal castle, attracted by the sound of music and laughter. "Let us go up unto this feast," he

[1] *Speculum Perfectionis*, cap. cv., edited by Paul Sabatier.

would say to his companion, "for, with the help of God, we may win some good harvest of souls." Knights and ladies left the banqueting hall when they heard of his arrival, and Francis standing on a low parapet of the courtyard preached so "devoutly and sublimely to them that all stood with their eyes and their minds turned on him as though an angel of God were speaking." And then the gay company returned to their feast and the two friars went on their way singing aloud from the joy in their hearts, and passed the night praying in some deserted church or rested under the olive trees on the hill-side. At dawn they rose and "went according to their rule, begging bread for the love of God, St. Francis going by one street and Brother Masseo by another. But St. Francis, being contemptible to look upon and small of stature, was accounted but a vile beggar by those who knew him not, and only received some mouthfuls of food and small scraps of stale bread; but to Brother Masseo, because he was tall and finely made, were given tit-bits in large pieces and in plenty and whole slices of bread. When they had done begging they met together outside the town to eat in a place where was a fair spring, and near by a fine broad stone whereon each placed the alms they had gathered, and St. Francis seeing the pieces of bread given to Brother Masseo to be more numerous, better, and far larger than his own rejoiced greatly. . . ."[1]

Masseo on one occasion wishing to try the humility of Francis mocked him saying, "Why doth all the world come after thee, and why is it that all men long to see thee, and hear thee, and obey thee? Thou art not a comely man, thou art not possessed of much wisdom, thou art not of noble birth; whence comes it then that the whole world doth run after thee?"

[1] *Fioretti*, cap. xiii.

It is easy to see the naive wonder of the practical Masseo in these words, a wonder doubtless shared by others who looked on from the same standpoint, at the extraordinary influence Francis obtained through his preaching. Their astonishment must have reached its height when Francis came to a little town near Bevagna (perhaps Cannara) where he preached with such fervour that the whole population wished to take the franciscan habit. Husbands, wives, nobles, labourers, young and old, rich and poor, rose up with one accord, ready to leave their homes and follow him to the end of the earth. Such an awakening by the simple words of a road-side preacher had never before been seen, and was the precursor of other popular demonstrations a few years later.[1] Francis, with extraordinary diplomacy, held the enthusiastic crowd in check without extinguishing their piety. He calmly viewed the situation and solved the difficulty where another, with less knowledge of human nature, might have been carried away by the opening of the flood-gates. It is not without amusement that one thinks of Francis coming to convert sinners, and then finding he had called into being an order of Religious who absolutely refused to separate from him. He calmed the weeping crowd, and with caution said to them: "'Be not in a hurry, neither leave your homes, and I will order that which ye are to do for the salvation of your souls:' and he then decided to create the Third Order for the universal salvation of all, and thus, leaving them much consoled and well disposed to penitence, he departed. . . ."

At a time when war, party feuds, and the unlawful seizure of property brought misery into the land, the Tertiaries, united by solemn vows to keep the commandments of God, to be reconciled to their enemies, and

[1] To franciscan influence must surely be traced the rise of the Flagellants at Perugia in 1265.

to restore what was not rightfully theirs, became a power which had to be reckoned with. The rule forbidding them to fight, save in defence of the Church or of their country, dealt a severe blow at the feudal system, and therefore met with much opposition among the great barons. Persecution only increased their power, for so early as 1227 Gregory IX, protected the Brothers of Penitence by a special Bull. The enemies of the Church soon discovered that they had a powerful antagonist in an Order which comprised the faithful of every age, rank, and profession, and whose religious practices, whilst creating a great bond of union among them, were not severe enough to take them away from social life in the very heart of the great cities. They formed a second vanguard to the papacy, and Frederick II, was heard to complain that this Third Order impeded the execution of his plans against the Holy See; while his chancellor Pier delle Vigne in one of his letters exclaims that the whole of Christendom seems to have entered its ranks.[1]

Thus both from within and from without the world was being moulded as Francis willed; all Italy responded to his call, and everywhere rose songs of praise to God from a people no longer oppressed by the squalor of their evil living. His energy and desire to gain souls drew him still further afield into the wilds of Slavonia, into Spain, Syria, Morocco, and later into Egypt, for the purpose of converting the Soldan. So great was his eagerness to arrive at his destination and begin to preach that, often leaving his companions far behind, he literally ran along the roads. He was "inebriated by the excessive fervour of his spirit," and on fire with divine love, and yet he failed on these missions in foreign lands. The reason probably lay in his total

[1] See *Histoire de Sainte Elizabeth*, Comte de Montalembert, pp. 71. 72.

ignorance of any language except Italian and Provençal, so that his words must have lost all their eloquence and power when delivered through the medium of an interpreter, and we know that Francis never made use of miracles to enforce his teaching.[1]

He returned to Assisi bitterly disappointed, and so despondent that for a while he was tempted to give up all idea of preaching. In this uncertainty he turned for council to Brother Sylvester and to St. Clare, who both urged him to continue his mission to the people; God, they said, had not elected him to work out his salvation in the solitude of a cell but for the salvation of all. He left the hermitage (perhaps the Carcere) and filled with new courage by their words, started on a fresh pilgrimage by "cities and castles," but this time among the Umbrians who knew and loved him. As he came near Bevagna in the plain a new crowd of listeners awaited him—troops of fluttering birds—bull-finches, rooks, doves, "a great company of creatures without number." Leaving his companions in a state of wonder on the road, he ran into the field saying, "I would preach to my little brothers the birds," and as he drew near, those that were on the ground did not attempt to fly away, while those perched on the trees flew down to listen to his sermon.

"My little brethren birds," he said, after saluting them as was his custom, "ye ought greatly to praise

[1] It is related that when in 1216 some Franciscans went on a mission to Germany the only word they knew was "Ja," which they used upon every occasion. In one town they were asked if they were heretics preaching a rival faith to catholicism, and as they continued to say "Ja, Ja," the citizens threw them into prison, and after beating them cruelly drove them ignominiously from the country. The account they gave of their experience to the other friars at Assisi created such a panic that they were often heard in their prayers to implore God to deliver them from the barbarity of the Teutons.

and love the Lord who created you, for He provideth all that is necessary, giving unto you feathers for raiment and wings to fly with. The Most High God has placed you among His creatures, and given you the pure air for your abode; ye do not sow neither do ye reap, but He keeps and feeds you."[1] Stretching out their necks, opening their beaks, and spreading their wings, the birds listened while they fixed their eyes upon the saint and never moved even when he walked in their midst touching them with his habit, until he made the sign of the Cross and allowed them to depart. He often related this episode which had made such a happy day in his life and had been of good augury at a time when he was sad.

The love of Francis for his "little brethren the birds," and indeed for all creatures however small, was one of the most beautiful traits in a character which stands out in such strong relief in the history of the middle ages. It was not only a poetical sentiment but the very essence of his being; a power felt by every living thing, from the brigand who left his haunts in the forests to follow him, to the half-frozen bees which crawled in winter to be fed with wine and honey from his hands. An understanding so complete with Nature was unknown until Francis stretched out his arms in yearning towards her shrines and drew the people, plunged in the gloom of Catharist doctrines, towards what was a religion in itself—the worship of the beautiful.

"Le treizième siècle était prêt pour comprendre la voix du poète de l'Ombrie; le sermon aux oiseaux clôt le règne de l'art byzantin et de la pensée dont il était l'image. C'est la fin du dogmatisme et de l'autorité; c'est l'avenement de l'individualisme et de l'inspiration,"[2]

[1] Celano. *Vita* I. cap. xxi.

[2] Paul Sabatier. *Vie de S. Francis d'Assise*, p. 205.

says M. Paul Sabatier. No one mocked at the sermon to the birds; no one wondered that leverets, loosed from the snare of the huntsman, should run to Francis for protection, or pheasants forsake the woods to seek a shelter in his cell; for so great an awakening had taken place in Italy that all understood the deep vein of poetry in their saint.

His biographers have transmitted these various anecdotes with a tenderness and simplicity which cannot fail to impress us with the belief that Francis, like many in our own time, possessed a marked attraction for all animals, a magnetism felt with equal strength by man and beast. Love was the Orphean lute he played upon, sending such sweet melody into the world that its strains have not yet died away.

Besides the feeling he had for the beautiful, the small, or the weak, there was another influence at work that made him walk with reverence over the stones, gather up the worms from the path to save them from being crushed, and buy the lambs that were being carried to market with their poor feet tied together. He saw in all things a symbol of some great truth which carried his thoughts straight to God. One day near Ancona he noticed a lamb following slowly and disconsolately a large herd of goats which made him think of Christ among the Pharisees. In pity he bought it from the goat-herd, and in triumph carried it to a neighbouring town where he preached a parable to an admiring crowd, even edifying the bishop by his piety.

Speaking of his favourite birds he would say, "Sister lark hath a hood like the Religious . . . and her raiment—to wit her feathers—resemble the earth. . . . And when she soars she praises God most sweetly." Such was his desire to protect them that he once said if he could only have speech with the

Emperor he would entreat him to pass a special edict for the preservation of his sisters the larks, and command the "Mayors of the cities and the Lord of the castles to throw grain on the roads by the walled towns" on the feast of the Nativity, so that all the birds should rejoice with man on that day. He found great joy in the open fields, the vineyards, the rocky ravines, and the forests which gave shelter to his feathered brethren; running water and the greenness of the orchards, earth, fire, air, and the winds so invited him to divine love that often he passed the whole day praising the marvels of creation. No wonder he turned his steps more willingly up the mountain paths to the hermitage of the Carceri than towards the crowded cities. Nature was his companion, his breviary the mirror wherein he saw reflected the face of the Creator. In the song of the nightingales, in the sound of their wings, in the petals of a tiny flower, in the ever changing glory of his own Umbrian valley he was always reminded of God, and for this he has been rightly called a "Pan-Christian."

There is not a corner in Umbria, one might almost say in Italy, which does not bear some record of the passage of the saint. The sick were brought to him and cured, those in trouble laid their sorrows before him and went away comforted. When anything went wrong, a hasty message was sent to Francis, and all with child-like simplicity trusted in him to set things right. We even hear that the people of Gubbio, being persecuted by a fierce wolf, had recourse to him, for they failed to protect themselves though the men sallied forth "as if going to battle." The saint had little difficulty in persuading Brother Wolf to lead a respectable life; and he, seeing the advantage of a peaceful existence, bowed his head and placed his paw,

as a solemn seal to the compact, in the hand of Francis amid the joyful cries of the people who marvelled greatly at the "novelty of the miracle." After this he could be seen walking gently through the streets of Gubbio to receive his daily ration at every door, cared for by the citizens "and not a dog would wag even his tongue against him." When Brother Wolf died there was bitter mourning in the city, for all felt as if a friend had passed away, and there was none left to remind them of the kindly saint who had helped them in their need. "Am I expected to believe these fairy tales?" some may ask with a sneer. The exact events related—no—but the spirit of these legends is more necessary to a true conception of the saint and the times in which he lived than all the histories that can ever be written about him. The Umbrians pictured him as they saw and understood him, and tradition going from mouth to mouth found finally its perfect expression in the "Little Flowers of St. Francis." Wonders and miracles are in every page, it is true, but then the peasants will tell you all things are possible in Umbria; the taming of wild beasts, the silencing of garrulous swallows who chattered so loudly while he preached, do not seem stranger to them than the conversion of brigands and murderers, for did not the very angels obey his wishes and play and sing to him one night when he lay ill in a lonely hermitage, longing for the sound of sweet strains to break the awful stillness round him?

Francis would have been sorely troubled had he foreseen the numberless miracles his biographers were going to attribute to him, for no saint was ever humbler. Even in his lifetime, oppressed by the homage paid him, he would say to his adorers with a touch of quaint humour: "do not be in such haste to proclaim me a saint, for I may still be the father of

children." He was always fearful lest people should overrate his good actions, and his horror of hypocrisy drove him to confess aloud to the people gathered round to listen to a sermon, in what manner he had given way to the desires of "Brother Body." Upon one occasion having used lard in lieu of the less wholesome oil when he was ill, he began his sermon by saying: "Ye come to me with great devoutness believing me to be a saint, but I do confess unto God and unto you that this Lent I have eaten cakes made with lard." Another time, after a severe chill, his companions sewed some fox-skin inside his habit to keep him somewhat warmer during the bitter cold, but he was not happy until a piece had been sewn also on the outside so that all might see the luxury he allowed himself.

It may at first seem strange that one so simple should have exercised such extraordinary influence on men and women of all ranks, an influence which has lasted with undiminished force for seven hundred years. But we must remember that a people, however ready to listen to the words of a reformer (especially an Italian crowd), will hardly be moved by calmness or sense; only when one like Francis stirs their imagination by a peculiar way of announcing God's word, and by acts sometimes bordering on insanity, can he completely succeed in winning them. The Assisans, at first shocked by some of the spectacles they witnessed in their sleepy town, jeered and murmured, until at last the saint literally took them by storm; and the more he risked their good opinion the louder they applauded him and wept for their sins. Astonishment was at its height when on the way to some service at the cathedral, the citizens saw Francis approaching them "naked save for his breeches," while Brother Leo carried his habit. He has gone

mad through too much penance, some thought. The truth was that Francis had imposed this same penance on Brother Ruffino who was then preaching to the people in the cathedral, and his conscience smote him so that he began to chide himself, saying: "Why art thou so presumptuous, son of Bernardone, vile little man, as to command Fra Ruffino, who is one of the noblest of the Assisans, to go and preach to the people as though he were mad." . . . So when Ruffino's sermon was ended Francis went up into the pulpit and preached with such eloquence on his Lady Poverty and on the nakedness and shame of the Passion suffered by Our Lord Jesus Christ "that the whole church was filled with the sound of weeping and wailing such as had never before been heard in Assisi." Thus did the force of originality win the people, and all those who had jeered but a few minutes before were much "edified and comforted by this act of St. Francis and Brother Ruffino; and St. Francis having reclad Brother Ruffino and himself, returned to the Portiuncula praising and glorifying God, who had given them grace to abase themselves to the edification of Christ's little sheep."

By word and example Francis taught his disciples to be especially humble towards the clergy. "If ye be sons of peace," he often said, "ye shall win both clergy and people, and this is more acceptable to God than to win the people only and to scandalise the clergy. Cover their backslidings and supply their many defects, and when ye have done this be ye the more humble." He had to struggle against much opposition among the bishops, who looked upon him and his friars as intruders encroaching upon their rights. People had often advised him to obtain a Bull from Rome, to enable him to preach without asking permission, but it was through the power of persistent

meekness that he wished to win his way to every heart, and the only weapons he used were those of love. St. Bonaventura tells us that the Bishop of Imola absolutely refused to let Francis call the citizens together and preach to them. "It suffices, friar, that I preach to the people myself," was the cross reply, and Francis, drawing his cowl over his head, humbly went his way. But after the short space of an hour he retraced his steps, and the bishop inquired with some anger why he had returned. He made answer in all humility of heart and speech: "My lord, if a father sends his son out at one door there is nothing left for him but to return by another." Then the bishop, vanquished by his humility, embraced him with a joyful countenance, saying: "Thou and all thy brethren shall have a general licence to preach throughout my diocese, as the reward of thy holy humility." [1]

This was the saint, gentle and sweet among men, who won the friendship of Ugolino, Bishop of Ostia (afterwards Pope Gregory IX). The bishop often spent quiet hours at the Portiuncula, trying perhaps to find, in the companionship of the saint and his poor friars, a peace he in vain sought amid the luxury of the Papal Court. Celano, [2] who may have been present during one of these meetings, tells us how he delighted in throwing off his rich robes and clothing himself in the Franciscan habit. In these moments of humility he would reverently bend the knee to Francis and kiss his hands. Besides his great admiration and love for the personality of the saint, he was not slow to perceive the services Francis had rendered

[1] *Vita di S. Francesco*, p. 76. Edizione Amoni (1888. Roma).

[2] Celano, a learned nobleman from Celano in the Abruzzi, joined the Order in 1215, and gives by far the most charming and vivid account of St Francis, for besides knowing him well he had the gift of writing in no ordinary degree.

in endeavouring to restore something of the pristine purity to Christianity, and further, the Order was fast becoming of political importance. The work of organising a community, no longer a handful of Assisan knights and yeomen following in the footsteps of their leader, was by no means an easy task; and Ugolino saw his way to bring it more closely into the service of the Church. Francis, whether willingly or not we cannot say, begged the Pope to name Ugolino Patron and Father of his Order. This was readily accorded, for it was felt in the papal circle that Francis was not so easy to drive as became a submissive child of the Church. They could not complain of actual disobedience, but he liked doing things his own way. By some at Rome it was suggested to him that he should adopt the Benedictine rule, by others that he might join his Order to that of St Dominic, but the saint smiled sweetly, and though so dove-like none succeeded in entangling him in their diplomatic nets. Indeed he puzzled Ugolino many times, and both Innocent III and Honorius III were never quite sure whether they had to do with a simpleton or a saint. The Roman prelates, completely out of sympathy with his doctrine of poverty, were only too ready to thwart him, and Ugolino knowing this advised him "not to go beyond the mountains" but remain in Italy to protect the interests of his order. He further persuaded him to come to Rome and preach before the Pope and cardinals, thinking that the personality of the saint might perchance win their favour. Anxious to do honour to his patron, Francis composed a sermon and committed it to memory with great care. When the slight, grey figure, the dust of the Umbrian roads still clinging to his sandals, stood up in the spacious hall of the Lateran before Honorius and the venerable cardinals, Ugolino watched with anxious eyes the

course of events. In mortal fear "he supplicated God with all his being that the simplicity of the holy man should not become an object of ridicule," and resigning himself to Providence he waited. There was a moment of suspense, of awful silence, for Francis had completely forgotten the sermon he had so carefully learned by heart. But his humility befriended him; stepping forward a few paces with a gesture of regret he quietly confessed what had happened, and then, as if indeed inspired, he broke forth into one of his most eloquent sermons. "He preached with such fervour of spirit," says Celano, "that being unable to contain himself for joy whilst proclaiming the Word of God, he moved even his feet in the manner of one dancing, not for play, but driven thereto by the strength of the divine love that burnt within him: therefore he incited none to laughter but drew tears of sorrow from all." [1]

When Francis had been preaching for some time a certain weariness seems to have possessed him, and he would then, "leaving behind him the tumult of the multitude," retire to some secret place to dwell in constant prayer and heavenly contemplation. There were many of these refuges, but none so isolated from the world as the lofty mountain of La Vernia, which had been given to him by Count Orlando Cattani of Chiusi, whose ruined castle can still be seen on a spur of the Apennines just below. The "Sacred Mount" rises clear above the valley of the Casentino to the height of 4000 feet, between the sources of the Tiber and the Arno, and looks straight down upon one of the perfect views in Tuscany which Dante speaks of:

> "The rills that glitter down the grassy slopes
> Of Casentino, making fresh and soft
> The banks whereby they glide to Arno's stream."

[1] *Vita* I. cap. xxvii.

Range upon range of splendid hills falling away gradually to the south gather in their folds the pale-tinted mists of early summer, and seem to guard the valley from other lands, so intense is the feeling of remoteness. From the white towns gleaming like pearls on their green slopes above the young Arno cradled by poplars, is seen the sharp outline of La Vernia against the sky, always black, gloomy, and defiant above the cornfields and vineyards. Its summit, covered with fir-trees, straight and close together, appears like a great whale that has rested there since the days of the flood. Below the forest lie huge boulders of rock and yawning chasms, upheaved, says the legend, during the earthquake at the time of the Crucifixion. To this solitary place came Francis in the year 1224 to celebrate by forty days of fasting and prayer the feast of St. Michael the Archangel, accompanied by Fra Leo "the little sheep of God," Fra Angelo "the gentle knight," Fra Illuminato, and Fra Masseo. On former visits he had been content to stay in a cell beneath a "fair beech tree" built for him by Count Orlando close to where the brethren lived; but this time he chose a spot on the loneliest side of the mountain where no sound could be heard. To reach it the brethren had to throw a bridge across a "horrible and fearful cleft in a huge rock," and after they had fashioned him a rough shelter they left him in utter solitude; only once in the day and once at night Fra Leo was permitted to bring a little bread and water which he left by the bridge, stealing silently away unless called by Francis. Near this lonely retreat a falcon had built a nest and used to wake him regularly a little before matins with his cry, beating his wings at his cell until the saint rose to recite his orations. Francis, charmed with so exact a clock, obeyed the summons, and such was the sympathy be-

tween the friends that the falcon always knew when he was weary or ill, and would then "gently, and like a discreet and compassionate person, utter his cry later . . . and besides this, in the day would sometimes stay quite tamely with him." The birds, which had shown joy on his arrival, filled the woods with their sweetest song while the angels visited him, sometimes playing such beautiful music on the viol that "his soul almost melted away." But Francis, honoured as he was by celestial spirits, and by man and beast, had still to receive the greatest sign of grace ever accorded to a saint, and the story has been gravely related by ancient and modern writers for seven centuries.

The moment had certainly arrived for accomplishing the high designs of Providence, for Francis through prayer, fasting, and constant contemplation on the Passion of Christ, had become like some spiritual being untrammelled by the bonds of the flesh. It was on the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross while praying on the mountain side, that the marvellous vision was vouchsafed to him. The dawn had hardly broken when "he beheld a Seraph who had six wings, which shone with such splendour that they seemed on fire, and with swift flight he came above the face of the Blessed Francis who was gazing upwards to the sky, and from the midst of the wings of the Seraph appeared suddenly the likeness of a man crucified with hands and feet stretched out in the manner of a cross, and they were marked with wounds like those of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and two wings of the said Seraph were above the head, two were spread as though flying, and two veiled the whole body."[1] Flames of fire lit up the mountains and the valley during the vision, and some muleteers

[1] *Vita di S. Francesco*, da S. Bonaventura, p. 148, Edizione Amoni.

seeing "the bright light shining through the windows of the inn where they slept, saddled and loaded their beasts thinking the day had broke." When Francis rose from his knees and looked up to the sky where the seraph had been and where now the sun was rising over the Casentino and her steepled towns, he bore on his body the marks of the Crucified. His hands and feet appeared as though pierced through with nails, the heads being on the inside of the hands and on the upper part of the feet, while blood flowed from the wound in his side. Thus transformed by his surpassing love for Christ, Francis returned to his four companions and recounted to them his vision, trying all the while out of his deep humility to hide from them the signs of the Stigmata. Before returning to Assisi he bade them a final farewell, for he knew this was the last time he would come with them to La Vernia. The scene is beautifully pictured in a letter of Fra Masseo, which, as far as we know, is here translated for the first time.

Jesus, Mary my Hope.

"Brother Masseo, sinner, and unworthy servant of Jesus Christ, companion of Brother Francis of Assisi, man most dear unto God, peace and greetings to all brethren and sons of the great patriarch Francis, standard-bearer of Christ.

"The great patriarch having determined to bid a last farewell to this sacred mount on the 30th of September 1224, the day of the feast of St Jerome, the Count Orlando of Chiusi sent to him an ass in order that he might ride thereon, forasmuch as he could not put his feet to the ground by reason of their being sore wounded and pierced with nails. In the morning early having heard mass, according to his

wont, in Sta. Maria degli Angeli,[1] he called all the brethren into the chapel, and bade them in holy obedience to live together in charity, to be diligent in prayer, always to tend the said place carefully, and to officiate therein day and night. Moreover he commended the whole of the sacred mount to all his brethren present, as well as to those to come, exhorting them to have a care that the said place should not be profaned, but always reverenced and respected, and he gave his benediction to all inhabitants thereof, and to all who bore thereunto reverence and respect. On the other hand, he said: 'Let them be confounded who are wanting in respect to the said place, and from God let them expect a well-merited chastisement.' To me he said: 'Know, Brother Masseo, that my intention is that on this mount shall live friars having the fear of God before their eyes, and chosen among the best of my order, let therefore the superiors strive to send here the worthiest friars; ah! ah! ah! Brother Masseo, I will say no more.'

"He then commanded and ordered me, Brother Masseo, and Brother Angelo, Brother Silvestro and Brother Illuminato, to have a special care of the place where that great miracle of the holy Stigmata occurred.[2] Having said that, he exclaimed 'Fare-

[1] This was a small chapel built for St. Francis by Count Orlando, and must not be confounded with the church of the same name near Assisi.

[2] The earnest wishes of the saint are to this day carried out by faithful friars who, even through the terrible winter months, live at La Vernia, suffering privation and cold with cheerfulness. At midnight a bell calls them to sing matins in the chapel of the Stigmata connected with the convent by an open colonnade, down which the procession files, following a crucifix and lanterns. When the service has ceased, the monks flit like ghosts behind the altar while the lights are extinguished and in the gloom comes the sound of clashing chains. For an hour they chastise themselves: then the

well, farewell, farewell, Brother Masseo.' Then turning to Brother Angelo, he said: 'Farewell, farewell,' and the same to Brother Silvestro and Brother Illuminato: 'Remain in peace, most dear sons, farewell, I depart from you in the body, but I leave my heart with you; I depart with Brother Lamb of God, and am going to Sta. Maria degli Angeli [1] never to return here more; I am going, farewell, farewell, farewell to all! Farewell, sacred mount. Farewell, mount Alvernia. Farewell, mount of the angels. Farewell, beloved Brother Falcon, I thank thee for the charity thou didst show me, farewell! Farewell, Sasso Spicco,[2] never more shall I come to visit thee, farewell, farewell, farewell, oh rock which didst receive me within thine entrails, the devil being cheated by thee, never more shall we behold one another! [3] Farewell, Sta.

torches are relit, the chanting is resumed, and calmly they pass down the corridor towards their cells. Moonlight may stream into the colonnade across the dark forms, or gusts of wind drive the snow in heaps before them, but the chanting is to be heard, and the monotonous cries of *ora pro nobis* break the awful solitude of night throughout the year upon the mountain of La Vernia.

[1] Here reference is made to the Portiuncula, near Assisi.

[2] The Sasso Spicco, which still can be seen at La Vernia, is a block of rock rising high above the mountain ridge, and seems to hang suspended in the air. It forms a roof over dark and cavernous places where St. Francis loved to pray, often spending his nights there with stones for his bed.

[3] The *Fioretti* relates that once while St. Francis was praying on the edge of a precipice, not far from the spot where he had received the Stigmata, suddenly the devil appeared in terrible form amidst the loud roar of a furious tempest. St. Francis, unable to flee or to endure the ferocious aspect of the devil, turned his face and whole body to the rock to which he clung; and the rock, as though it had been soft wax, received the impress of the saint and sheltered him. Thus by the aid of God he escaped.

Maria degli Angeli, mother of the eternal Word. I commend to thee these my sons.'

"Whilst our beloved father was speaking these words, our eyes poured forth torrents of tears, so that he also wept as he turned to go, taking with him our hearts, and we remained orphans because of the departure of such a father.

"I, Brother Masseo, have written this with tears. May God bless us."

For two years after his return from La Vernia, Francis, bearing the marks of the Seraph, continued to preach and visit the lazar houses, although he was so ill and worn by fasts and vigils that his companions marvelled how the spirit could still survive in so frail a body. Moreover he had become nearly blind, remaining sometimes sixty days and more unable to see the light of day or even the light of fire. It was to him a martyrdom that while walking in the woods led by one of the brethren, the scenes he loved so well should be hidden by this awful darkness. He could only dream of the past when he had journeyed from one walled town to another through the valley of Spoleto; sometimes rejoicing in the brilliant sunshine, often watching the storms sweeping so gloriously over the land in summer when the rocky beds of torrents were filled with rushing water and clouds cast purple shadows across the plain. Now those wanderings were over, and the spirit imprisoned within him found more than ever an outlet in music, and "the strain of divine murmurs which fell upon his ears, broke out in Gallic songs."

He went on his way singing to meet death, and the greater his sufferings the sweeter were the melodies he composed. It was during an access of his infirmities and blindness that St. Clare induced him to take some

days of rest in a small wattle hut she had built in the olive grove close to her convent of San Damiano. After nights of bitter tribulation, of bodily suffering, passed in earnest prayer, he arose one morning with his heart full of new praises to the Creator. Meditating for a while he exclaimed, "Altissimo, omnipotente bono Signore," and then composed a chaunt thereon, and taught it to his companions so that they might proclaim and sing it. His soul was so comforted and full of joy that he desired to send for Brother Pacifico, who in the world had borne the title of King of Verse and had been a most renowned troubadour, and to give to him as companions some of the brethren to go about the world preaching and singing praises to the Lord . . . he willed also that when the preaching was ended all together should as minstrels of God sing lauds unto Him. And at the close of the singing he ordered that the preacher should say to the people: "We are the minstrels of the Lord God wherefore we desire to be rewarded by you, to wit, that you persevere in true repentance."[1]

It was the Canticle of the Sun which Francis composed in his days of blindness, leaving it as an undying message to the world, an appeal that they should not cease to love the things he had brought to their knowledge during those earlier days of his ministry among them. He poured the teaching of a life-time into a song of passionate praise to the Creator of a world he had loved and found so beautiful; and the sustained melody of the long, rolling lines charm our fancy like the sound of waves during calm nights breaking upon the beach. The poem, though rough and unhewn, still remains one of the marvels of early literature, and to Francis belongs the honour of setting his seal on the religious poetry

[1] *Speculum Perfectionis*, cap. c., edited by Paul Sabatier.

of his country. His was the first glow of colour proclaiming the dawn—the first notes of song which, coming from Assisi, passed along the ranks of Italian poets to be taken up by Dante in "full-throated ease." We give the Canticle of the Sun in the exquisite version of Matthew Arnold.

"O most high, almighty, good Lord God, to Thee belong praise, glory, honour, and all blessing!

"Praised be my Lord God with all His creatures; and specially our brother the sun, who brings us the day, and who brings us the light; fair is he, and shining with a very great splendour: O Lord, he signifies to us Thee!

"Praised be my Lord for our sister the moon, and for the stars, the which he has set clear and lovely in heaven.

"Praised be our Lord for our brother the wind, and for air and cloud, calms and all weather, by the which thou upholdest in life all creatures.

"Praised be my Lord for our sister water, who is very serviceable unto us, and humble, and precious, and clean.

"Praised be my Lord for our brother fire, through whom thou givest us light in the darkness; and he is bright, and pleasant, and very mighty, and strong.

"Praised be my Lord for our mother the earth, the which doth sustain us and keep us, and bringeth forth divers fruits and flowers of many colours, and grass.

"Praised be my Lord for all those who pardon one another for his love's sake, and who endure weakness and tribulation; blessed are they who peaceably shall endure, for Thou, O most Highest, shalt give them a crown![1]

[1] St. Francis composed this verse later on the occasion of a quarrel which arose between the Bishop of Assisi and the Podestà. The last couplet was added at the Portiuncula while he was on his death-bed.

"Praised be my Lord for our sister, the death of the body, from whom no man escapeth. Woe to him who dieth in mortal sin! Blessed are they who are found walking by Thy most holy will, for the second death shall have no power to do them harm.

"Praise ye and bless ye the Lord, and give thanks unto Him, and serve Him with great humility."

THE ARMS OF THE FRANCISCANS.

CHAPTER III

The Carceri, Rivo-Torto and Life at the Portiuncula

"O beata solitudo,
O sola beatudine."

THESE three places near Assisi, so intimately associated with St. Francis, were in a way emblematic of the various stages in the rise and growth of his young community, and we shall see that the saint went from one to the other, not by chance, but with a settled purpose in his mind. The Carceri he kept as a something apart from, and outside his daily life; it was a hermitage in the strict sense of the word, where, far from the sound of any human voice, he could come and live a short time in isolated communion with God. As his followers increased, and the Order he had founded with but a few brethren developed even in its first years into a great army, we can easily understand the longing for solitude which at times became too strong to be resisted, for his nature was well fitted for the hermit's life, and it called him with such persistence to the woods among the flowers and the birds he loved, that had he been less tender for the sufferings of others, more blind to the ills of the Church, it is possible that the whole course of events might have been altered. Giotto would not have been called to Assisi, or if he had been, the legends told to him by the friars might not have inspired him to paint such

master-pieces as he has left us in the Franciscan Basilica; and we should now be the poorer because St. Francis had chosen seven hundred years ago to live in an Etruscan tomb at Orte, or in a grotto on Mount Subasio. So much depended, not only upon what St. Francis achieved, but on the way in which he chose to work. Who therefore can tell how much we owe to the little mountain retreat of the Carceri, where, spending such hours of wondrous peace surrounded by all that he most cherished in nature, the saint could refresh himself and gain new strength for long periods of arduous labour among men.

HERMITAGE OF THE CARCERI

The Carceri came into the possession of St. Francis through the generosity of the Benedictines who, until his advent, had held unlimited sway in Umbria. Many churches, and we may say, almost all the hermitages of the surrounding country belonged to them. But their principal stronghold, built in the eleventh century, stood on the higher slopes of Mount Subasio, while the Carceri, lying a little to the west, was used by them probably as a place of retreat when wearied of

monastic life. Both monastery and hermitage seem to have been quiet enough, and we only occasionally hear of the Benedictine monks starting off on a visit to some hermit of renowned sanctity, or going upon some errand of mercy among the peasants in the valley, whom they often surprised by marvellous though somewhat aimless miracles wrought for their edification. Then early in the fourteenth century these hermit monks of Mount Subasio suddenly found themselves in the midst of the fighting of a mediæval populace, for the Assisans, not slow to discover the great military importance of the Benedictine Abbey, wished to possess it. When the struggle between Guelph and Ghibelline was at its height, the monks were driven to take refuge in the town, while their home was taken possession of by the exiled party who used it as a fortress whence they could sally forth and harass the eastern approach to Assisi. Perpetual skirmishes took place beneath its walls until the roving adventurer Broglia di Trino, who had made himself master of the town in 1399, in a solemn council held at the Rocca Maggiore issued an edict that the Monastery of St. Benedict was to be razed to the ground, determining thus to deprive the turbulent nobles and their party of so sure a refuge in times of civil war.

The solid walls and fine byzantine columns of what once was the most celebrated abbey in Umbria now remain much as in the mediæval days of their wreckage, and, until a few years ago when some repairs were made, the church was open for the mountain birds to nest in, and wild animals used it as their lair.

But both church and monastery stood proudly upon the mountain height above the plain when St. Francis, then the young mendicant looked upon by many as a madman, would knock at the gates, and the abbot followed by his monks, came out to listen to the

humble requests he so often had to make. These prosperous religious most generously patronised St. Francis in the time of his obscurity, giving him the chapel of the Portiuncula, and later (the date is uncertain but some say in 1215) they allowed him to take possession of the still humbler chapel and huts of the Carceri. Even to call such shelters huts is giving them too grand a name, for they were but caverns excavated in the rock, scattered here and there in a deep mountain gorge. They can still be seen, unchanged since the days of St. Francis save for the tresses of ivy growing thick, like a curtain, across the entrance, for now there are none to pass in and out to pray there.

Even the attempt to describe the loneliness and discomfort of this hermitage seems to strike terror into the hearts of later franciscan writers, who no longer caring to live in caves, only saw Dantesque visions when they thought of these arid, sunburnt rocks, rushing torrents and wild wastes of mountains which even shepherds never reached. But luckily in those days there was one Umbrian who loved such isolated spots; and the charm of that silence, born of the very soul of Francis and guarded jealously by nature herself during long centuries in memory of him, now tempts us up the mountain side upon a pilgrimage to the one place where his spirit still lives in all its primitive vigour and purity.

The road leading to the Carceri[1] from the Porta Cappucini passes first through rich corn fields and olive groves, but as it skirts round Mount Subasio towards

[1] It has sometimes happened that visitors, who have not read their Murray with sufficient care, thinking "Le Carceri" are prisons where convicts are kept, leave Assisi without visiting this charming spot. "Carceri" certainly now means "prisons," but the original meaning of the word in old Italian is a place surrounded by a fence and often remote from human habitation

the ravine it becomes a mere mountain track. Only here and there, where peasants have patiently scraped away the stones, grows a little struggling corn, while small hill flowers nestle between the rocks unshaded even by olive trees; the colour of a stray Judas tree, or a lilac bush in bloom, only makes the landscape seem more barren and forlorn. Looking upon the road to Spello, winding down the hill through luxuriant fields of indian corn and olive groves, with the oak trees spreading their still fresher green over the vineyards of the plain, we feel that this pathway to the Carceri is something novel and unlike anything at Assisi which we have hitherto explored. Just as we are marvelling at its loveliness, a sudden turn brings Assisi once more in view, and the sight we get of it from here carries us straight back to the days of St. Francis; for the great basilica and convent are hidden by the brow of the hill, and what we now see is exactly what he looked upon so often as he hastened from Assisi to his hermitage, or left it when he was ready to take up the burden of men's lives once more. The old walls, looking now much as they did after a stormy battle with Perugia, stretch round the same rose-tinted town, which, strangely enough, time has altered but slightly —it is only a little more toned in colour, the Subasian stone streaked here and there with deeper shades of yellow and pink, while the castle is more ruined, rearing itself less proudly from its green hill-top than in earlier days of splendour. But charming as the view of the town is, we quickly leave it to watch the changes of light and colour in the valley and on the wide-bedded Tescio as it twists and turns in countless sharp zig-zags till we lose it where it joins the Tiber—there where the mist rises. We might travel far and not find so fascinating a river as the Tescio; only a trickle of water it is true, but sparkling in the sunshine like

a long flash of lightning which has fallen to earth and can find no escape from a tangle of fields and vineyards.[1] Then our road turns away again from the glowing valley shimmering in the haze of a late May afternoon, and mounting ever higher we plunge into the very heart of the Assisan mountain, uncultivated, wild, colourless and yet how strangely beautiful.

Another half mile brings us round the mountain side to a narrow gorge, and the only thing in sight except the ilex trees is an arched doorway with a glimpse, caught through the half open gate, of a tiny courtyard. A step further on and we find ourselves standing amidst a cluster of cells and chapels seeming as if they hung from the bare rocks with nothing to prevent them falling straight into the depths of the ravine; and the silence around is stranger far than the mountain solitude. Surely none live here, we think, when suddenly a brown-clothed friar looks round the corner of a door, and without waste of time or asking of questions beckons us to follow, telling rapidly as he goes the story of each tree, rock, cell and shrine.

Crossing two or three chapels and passing through a trap-door and down a ladder, we reach a narrow cave-like cell where St. Francis used to sleep during those rare moments when he was not engaged in prayer. As at La Vernia this "bed" was scooped out of the rock, and a piece of wood served him as a pillow. Adjoining is an oratory where the crucifix the saint always carried with him is preserved. The doors are so narrow and so low that the smallest person must stoop and edge in sideways. From these underground caves

[1] It is perhaps an insult to the Tescio to leave the traveller in Umbria under the impression that this mountain torrent is always dry. Certainly that is its usual condition, but we have seen it during the storms that break upon the land in August and September overflow its banks and inundate the country on either side; but with this wealth of water its beauty goes.

it is a joy to emerge once more into the sunlight, and one of the delightful surprises of the place is to step straight out of the oppressive darkness of the cells into the ilex wood, with the banks above and around us glowing with sweet-scented cyclamen, yellow orchids, and long-stemmed violets. It is not surprising that St. Francis often left his cell to wander further into these woods when the birds, as though they had waited for his coming, would gather from all sides and intercept him just as he reached the bridge close to the hermitage. While they perched upon an ilex tree (which is still to be seen), he stood beneath and talked to them as only St. Francis knew how. His first sermon to the birds took place at Bevagna, but at the Carceri he was continually holding conversations with his little feathered brethren. This perhaps was also where he held his nocturnal duet with the nightingale, which was singing with especial sweetness just outside his cell. St. Francis called Brother Leo to come also and sing and see which would tire first, but the "little Lamb of God" replied that he had no voice, refusing even to try. So the saint went forth alone to the strange contest, and he and the bird sang the praises of God all through the darkest hours of the night until, quite worn out, the saint was forced to acknowledge the victory of Brother Nightingale.

Very different is the story of his encounter with the tempting devil whom he precipitated by his prayers into the ravine below; the hole through which the unwelcome visitor departed is still shown outside the saint's cell. Devils do not play a very prominent part in the story of the first franciscans, but this mountain solitude seems to have so excited the imaginations of later chroniclers that yet another story of a devil belongs to the Carceri, and is quaintly recounted in the *Fioretti*. This time he appeared to Brother Rufino in the form

of Christ to tempt him from his life of holiness. "O Brother Rufino," said the devil, "have I not told thee that thou shouldst not believe the son of Pietro Bernardone? . . . And straightway Brother Rufino made answer: 'Open thy mouth that I may cast into it filth.' Whereat the devil, being exceeding wroth, forthwith departed with so furious a tempest and shaking of the rocks of Mount Subasio, which was hard by, that the noise of the falling rocks lasted a great while; and so furiously did they strike one against the other in rolling down that they flashed sparks of terrific fire in all the valley, and at the terrible noise they made St. Francis and his companions came out of the house in amazement to see what strange thing was this; and still is to be seen that exceeding great ruin of rocks."

Close to the spot rendered famous by the devil's visits a bridge crosses the gorge of a great torrent, which, threatening once to destroy the hermitage, was miraculously dried up by St. Francis, and now only fills its rocky bed when any public calamity is near. From it a good view is obtained of the hermitage, but perhaps a still better is to be had from under the avenue of trees a little beyond, on the opposite side of the deep ravine whence the groups of hovels are seen to hang like a honeycomb against the mountain side, so tightly set together that one can hardly distinguish where the buildings begin and the rock ends.

The ilex trees grow in a semicircle round this cluster of cells and caverns, and high above it all rises a peak of Mount Subasio, grey as St. Francis' habit, with a line of jagged rocks on the summit which looks more like the remains of some Umbrian temple of almost prehistoric days than the work of nature.

The sides of this mountain ravine approach so near together that only a narrow vista of the plain is obtained, blue in the summer haze, with no village or even

house in sight. It would be difficult to find a place with the feeling of utter solitude so unbroken, and as we realised that these friars lived here nearly all their life, many not even going to Assisi more than once in five years, we said to one of them: "How lonely you must be," and he, as though recalling a time of

THE CARCERI WITH A VIEW OF THE BRIDGE

struggle in the world, answered: "Doubtless there are better things in the town, but here, at the Carceri, there is peace."

It is the hermit's answer; but now the need of such lives has long since passed away, and even St. Francis, living at the time when the strain of perpetual warfare, famine, pestilence and crime, created a fierce craving for solitude in the lives of many, realised that a hermitage must only be a place to rest in for a while—not to

live in. His anxiety to keep his Order from becoming a contemplative one is shown in the following rule he carefully thought out for his disciples. "Those religious who desire to sojourn in a hermitage are to be at the most three or four. Two are to be like mothers having a son. Two are to follow the life of a Martha, the other the life of a Mary." Then they were to go forth again strenuously to their work abroad and give place to others in search of rest and peace.

But after the death of St. Francis the Carceri gradually lost its primitive use, and the principal person who entirely changed its character was St. Bernardine of Siena who in 1320 made many alterations and additions, building a larger chapel, adding cells and a kitchen, but so small, remarks a discontented franciscan chronicler, that it barely held the cooking utensils. Although we can no longer call it a hermitage, the Carceri became the type of an ideal franciscan convent such as Francis dreamed of for his followers when he went to live at the Portiuncula, and such it has remained to this day. For certainly the place, as left by St. Bernardine, would have been approved of by the first franciscans as a dwelling-place, but those of later years can only tell us of its discomforts. Here is a graphic description of its primeval simplicity which very nearly corresponds to its present state: "It were better called a grotto with six lairs; one sees but the naked rock untouched by the chisel, all rough and full of holes as left by nature; those who see it for the first time are seized with extraordinary fear on climbing the ladder leading to the dormitory, at each end of which are other poor buildings, added by the religious according as need arose for the use of the friars, who do not care to live as hermits did in the olden times. The refectory is small, and can contain but few friars; a brother guardian made an excavation, of sufficient

height and breadth in the rock, and added thereto a table around which can sit other six religious, so that those who take their places at this new table are huddled up in the arched niche which forms a baldaquin above their heads. There is also a little common room which horrifies all beholders, wherein is lit a fire, for besides being far inside the rocky mass it is gloomy beyond description by reason of the dense smoke always enclosed therein, this is a lively cause to the religious of reflection on the hideousness and obscurity of the darkness of hell; in lieu of receiving comfort from the fire the poor friars generally come out with tears in their eyes." To somewhat atone for these discomforts they possessed a fountain, raised, as we are told, by the prayers of St. Francis, which never ran dry, "a miracle God has wished to perpetuate for the glory of His faithful servants and the continual comfort of the monks."

The crucifixion in the chapel built by St. Bernardine adjoining the choir, is said to have been painted by his orders. The artistic merits of the fresco are questionable, but connected with it is a legend possibly invented by some humorous member of the franciscan brotherhood in order to point a moral to his companions. "Here," says a chronicler, "is adored that most marvellous crucifixion, so famous in religion; it is well known to have spoken several times to the devout Sister Diomira Bini of the Third Order of St. Francis and a citizen of Assisi; and in our own times, in the last century (the seventeenth) it was seen by Brother Silvestro dello Spedalicchio to detach itself from the cross, and with most gentle slaps on the face, warn a worshipper to be reverent and vigilant while praying in this His Sacred Oratory."

In a small wooden cupboard in the chapel, according to an inventory made two hundred years ago, are pre-

served some relics, a few of which we have unfortunately not been able to identify. Part of the wooden pillow used by St. Francis, and a piece of the Golden Gate through which our Lord passed into Jerusalem, are still here, but the hair of the Virgin, and, strangest of all, some of the earth out of which God created Adam, are no longer to be found!

Ten or twelve friars continued to live at the Carceri for a few years after the death of St. Bernardine; some begged their daily bread from the villagers in the valley, others dug in the tiny garden at the foot of the ravine where a few vegetables grew, and two always remained at the convent to spin the wool for the habits of the religious. But soon wearying of the life they went to live at other convents, and the place passed away from the franciscans into the possession of various sects, among others to the excommunicated Fraticelli. In 1415 it was given back to the Observants, and Paolo Trinci, who had done much to reform the Order, persuaded some friars to live once more at the deserted hermitage. Again the Carceri became such an ideal franciscan convent that many came from afar to visit it, and there is a strange story of how a "woman monk" found a home and died here in the middle of the fifteenth century.

"Beata Anonima," a chronicler recounts, "being already a Cistercian nun in the convent of S. Cerbone of Lucca at the time of the siege of that city by the Florentines, when the said nuns, for valid reasons, were transferred to the convent of Sta. Christina inside the city. Now this most fervent servant of God took this opportune time and fled by stealth, disguised as a man, and went, or rather flew, to Assisi; there, fired with an ardent desire to fight under the seraphic standard, she breathlessly climbed the steep slopes of Mount

Subasio, and having found the horrible cavern of Santa Maria delle Carceri fervently entreated those good Fathers to admit her amongst them and to bestow on her their sacred habit, for which her longing was extreme. At length, having overcome all resistance, believing her to be a man as appeared from her dress, and not a woman which in reality she was, they admitted her to the convent and gave her the habit of religion." She edified all by the holiness of her life and the rigid penances she performed, but her health soon suffered and only upon her death-bed, surrounded by the friars chanting the psalms for the dying, the Blessed Anonima confessed to the fraud she had practised in order to dwell in the hermitage rendered so dear because of the memory of the Poverello d'Assisi.

Rivo-Torto[1]

A straight and stony road, the old Roman one, now overgrown in many parts with grass and trails of ivy and bordered by mulberry and oak trees, leads out of the Porta Mojano to two little chapels in the

[1] The large modern church of Rivo-Torto, on the road from Sta. Maria degli Angeli to Spello, built to enclose the huts that St. Francis and his companions are supposed to have lived in while tending the lepers, has been proved without doubt by M. Paul Sabatier to have no connection whatever with the Saint. In these few pages we have followed the information given in a pamphlet which is to be found in the Italian translation of his *Vie de S. François d'Assise.* It is impossible here to enter into all the arguments relating to this disputed point, but I think the authority of the best, and by far the most vivid of the biographers of St. Francis can be trusted without further comment, and that we may safely believe the hut of St. Francis, known as Rivo-Torto, lay close to the present chapels of San Rufino d'Arce and Sta. Maria Maddalena. See Appendix for information as to their exact position in the plain and the nearest road to them. *Disertazione sul primo luogo abitato dai Frati Minori su Rivo-Torto e nell'Ospedale dei Lebbrosi di Assisi.* di Paul Sabatier (Roma, Ermanno Loescher and Co., 1896).

plain. Set back from the main road in the midst of the fields few people find them, and the peasants know nothing of their story and can only tell of a miraculous well in which a youthful saint met his death. When his body was brought to the surface a lily had grown from his mouth and upon its petals was written in letters of gold the one word, *Veritas*, for he had died in the cause of truth. Since then, as the peasants recount with pride, many come from afar to drink of the waters of this well for it cures every ill. It is over-grown with ferns and close by stands an ancient sarcophagus where the children sit to eat their midday meal. A piece of old worn sculpture still ornaments the chapel of the young martyr, and the feeling of the place is very charming, but the pilgrim who comes to Assisi to visit St. Francis, has a different picture to recall with another kind of beauty belonging to it than that of holy wells and flowering banks and meadows.

It is difficult, when looking on San Rufino d'Arce, with its cluster of vine-shaded peasant houses, and then on Santa Maria Maddalena, narrow windowed, the small apse marking it as a primitive Umbrian chapel of the fields, to realise that in the Middle Ages this was a leper village separated from Assisi by a little more than a mile of open country. And yet here, without doubt, we have Rivo-Torto where, even before his famous interview with Innocent III, St. Francis had stayed with those three first Assisan companions, Bernard di Quintavalle, Peter Cataneo and Egidio. Then in the autumn of 1210, when he returned from Rome after the rule of poverty had been sanctioned by the Church, but before he was ready to begin his mission as preacher, he came to live among the lepers, forming with his disciples a little family which we may call the beginning of a first franciscan settlement.

The leper village was divided according to the social rank of the outcasts, the richer living together near the chapel of Sta. Maria Maddalena and forming quite a community with the right of freely administering their own goods. As M. Sabatier observes, it was therefore not "only a hospital, but almost a little town near the city with the same social distinctions of classes."

Those tended by St. Francis were the poorest of the lepers, whose wretched hovels lay near the chapel of San Rufino d'Arce; and Celano must be referring to this settlement when he tells us how Francis in his early days, even if he chanced to look down from Assisi upon the houses of the lepers in the plain, would hold his nostrils with his hand, because his horror of them was so great.

But as the grace of God touched his heart, making him take pity upon all things weak and suffering, he turned the force of his strong nature to overcoming this repugnance, and there is a beautiful story telling of the first victory gained shortly after his conversion. While riding one day near Assisi he met a leper, and filled with disgust and even fear at the sight, his first impulse was to turn his horse round, but, remembering his new resolutions to follow the teaching of Christ, he went forward to meet the poor man, and even kissed the hand extended to him for alms. "Then," says St. Bonaventure, "having mounted his horse, he looked around him over the wide and open plain, but the leper was nowhere to be seen. And Francis being filled with wonder and gladness, devoutly gave thanks to God, purposing within himself to proceed to still greater things than this." Certainly the event heralded a life of holiness, and was the means of rousing his latent energies and the feelings for self-sacrifice which drove him from the wild and solitary

places he loved into the very midst of the world, there to work strenuously, in every part of Italy, at first among lepers and then among the wealthy, the ignorant and the sorrowful.

For the life at Rivo-Torto led by "these valiant despisers of the great and good things of this world" we cannot do better than turn to the Three Companions (Brothers Masseo, Ruffino and Leo) who knew by personal experience the hardships and roughness of the place. Feelingly they describe: "a hovel, or rather a cavern abandoned by man; the which place was so confined that they could hardly sit down to repose themselves. Many a time they had no bread, and ate nought but turnips which they begged for here and there in travail and in anguish. On the beams of the poor hut the man of God wrote the names of the brethren, so that whoso would repose or pray might know his place and not disturb, by reason of the cramped and limited space in the small hovel, the quietude of the night." Even the appearance of Otto IV, close to their hut seems in no way to have disturbed the peaceful course of their lives, but only gave St. Francis the opportunity of bestowing a timely warning upon the Emperor. Celano, ever delighting in the picturesque details of ceremonies and pageants, tells us how "there came at that time with much noise and pomp the great Emperor on his way to take the terrestial crown of the Empire; now the most holy father with his companions being in the said house near the road where the cavalcade was passing, would neither go out to see it, nor permit his brethren to go, save one, whom he commanded fearlessly to announce to Otto that his glory would be short-lived."

Thus, if the tale be true, a German Emperor was the first to listen to Francis' message to a mediæval world sunk in the love of earthly things, and who

knows whether the saint's words did not come back to Otto again in after years.

The Penitents of Assisi only remained until the spring at Rivo-Torto, for even during those few months' sojourn among the lepers their numbers had so increased that it became necessary to think of some surer abode. One day St. Francis called the brethren to tell them how he had thought of obtaining from one of his various kind friends in Assisi, a small chapel where they could peacefully say their Hours, having some poor little houses for shelter close by built of wattle and mud.

His speech was pleasing to the brethren, and so, following the master they loved and trusted, all went to dwell at the Portiuncula, where, as we shall see, a new life was to begin for them.

THE PORTIUNCULA

"Holy of Holies is this Place of Places,
Meetly held worthy of surpassing honour!
Happy thereof the surname, 'Of the Angels,'
Happier yet the name, 'The Blessed Mary.'

Now, a true omen, the third name conferreth
'The Little Portion' on the Little Brethren,
Here, where by night a presence oft of Angels
Singing sweet hymns illumineth the watches."
(*The Mirror of Perfection*, translated by Sebastian Evans.)

Those who want to realise the charm of the Portiuncula and of the memories that cling about it, must try to forget the great church which shuts out from it the sunlight, and with the early chroniclers as their guides, call up the image of St. Francis with his first disciples who in an age of unrest came here to seek for peace.

Make your pilgrimage in the springtime or in the early summer, when pink hawthorn and dogroses are

flowering in every hedge and the vines fill the valley with a delicate green light. Looking at cities and villages so purely Umbrian, some spread among cornfields close to a swift clear river, others set upon heights which nearly touch the sky on stormy days, we forget that beyond these hills and mountains encircling the big valley of Umbria stretch other lands as fair. We forget, because it is a little world which during long centuries has been set apart from all else, and where man has but completed the work of nature herself. During the long hours of a summer's day, when the sense of remoteness in the still plain is most intense, it brings to us, as nothing else can ever do, some feeling of that early time when four hermits came from Palestine and found a quiet retreat in the oak forests of Assisi.

It was in the year 352, as St. Cyril, Patriarch of Jerusalem, relates, when a cross had been seen stretched from Calvary to the Mount of Olives and to shine more brightly than the sun, that four holy men, impelled by a feeling that some great crisis was at hand, determined to visit the shrines of Rome. Having performed their devotions and offered many precious relics to Pope Liberius, they expressed a great desire to find some hermitage where, each in a silent cell, they could meditate upon the marvellous things they had seen in the Eternal City. The Pope gave them most excellent advice when he told them to go to the Spoletan valley. With his sanction to choose any part of it they liked, they passed over the mountains dividing Umbria from the Campagna, and by many towns until, when about a mile from Assisi, they determined to build their dwellings in the plain, thinking, as indeed they might, to find no other spot so suited for a quiet retreat. Close to four huts of rough hewn stone and brushwood they erected a tiny chapel with a pent roof and narrow

window which, perhaps in memory of their native valley, they dedicated to St. Mary of Jehosaphat. But after a few years, forsaking the life of hermits, they again took up their staves and returned home to Palestine by way of the Romagna, leaving beneath the altar of the chapel they had built a relic of the Virgin's sepulchre.

SIDE DOOR OF THE PORTIUNCULA BUILT BY ST. BENEDICT

At different times other devout hermits, charmed by the lonely chapel, took possession of it for a time, but it was often deserted for many years. Its preservation is due to St. Benedict who, passing through Umbria during the early part of the sixth century, was inspired to restore the ruined chapel and dwell near it for awhile. He not only repaired the walls, but built the two large round arched doors we see to this day, and which many declare to be quite out of proportion to the rest of the building, but their unusual size is accounted for

by a charming legend. Once when St. Benedict was praying in the chapel he saw a marvellous vision as he knelt wrapt in ecstasy. A crowd of people were praying around him to St. Francis, singing hymns of praise and calling for mercy on their souls, while outside still greater multitudes waited for their turn to come and pray before the shrine. St. Benedict, understanding from this that a great saint would one day be honoured here, made the two doors in the chapel, and made them large enough for many to pass in and out at a time. Thus was the feast of the "Pardon of St. Francis" prepared for some seven hundred years too soon.

St. Benedict obtained from the Assisans the gift of a small plot of ground near the sanctuary, which suggested to him the name of St. Mary of the Little Portion—Sta. Maria della Portiuncula. When a few years later St. Benedict founded his famous order at Monte Cassino, he did not forget the Umbrian chapel he had saved from ruin, and sent some of his monks to live there and to minister among the people. Like the first hermits they lived in poor huts, saying their Hours in the little chapel, until in the eleventh century they built a large monastery and church upon the higher slopes of Mount Subasio to the east of Assisi, and the Portiuncula was again deserted. But although no one lived near, and mass was never celebrated there, it still remained in the keeping of the benedictines who occasionally must have seen to its repair, and thus preserved it for the coming of St. Francis.

It has been suggested to me that the spot selected by the four holy pilgrims in the fourth century may have been even then the site of a sacred shrine, for the custom of erecting tabernacles over the graves of distinguished persons reaches back to very early times. Originally designed as a mortuary cell such a structure

might, being duly oriented, come to be used as a chapel for service.

The subject of "Sepulchral Cellœ" will be found treated of by the late Sir Samuel Fergusson[1] in a memoir in which he figures some of the burial vaults and early oratories of Ireland, some of which are in shape identical with Sta. Maria della Portiuncula, with the same pent roof, round arched door, and perfectly plain walls. A building thus erected over a grave was called *Porticulus*, and any who pillaged "a house made in form of a basilica over a dead person" had to pay a fine.

From an archæological point of view there is much to be desired in the published descriptions of the Portiuncula. A great part of its exterior walls is now covered with frescoes which hide all detail, but perhaps a minute examination of the interior walls might reveal portions of the foundations built upon by St. Benedict, and we sincerely hope that these few words may attract attention to so interesting a subject.

But even if the shrine said to have been built by the hermits from Palestine for Our Lady's Girdle turns out to have been an ancient tomb, the later legends are by no means destroyed. It is not unlikely that St. Benedict, attracted as much by lonely places as St. Francis, took possession of the Umbrian tomb, and perhaps little thinking what it was, rebuilt and used it as a chapel. Whatever may be the true story, it is very certain that the Portiuncula, from earliest times, has possessed a strange attraction for all who passed by, each one thinking a tiny chapel situated so charmingly in the woods, within sight, though not within sound, of the Umbrian towns, to be a perfect spot for prayer.

[1] See *The Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. xxvii Nov. 1882.

The country people treasure the legend that Madonna Pica often came to pray at the Portiuncula, and through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin obtained a son after seven years of waiting, and this son of prayer and patience was St. Francis of Assisi.

Half ruined and neglected as the chapel was, Francis learned, even as quite a child, to love it, and kneeling therein by his mother's side would pray with all the fervour of his childish faith. Later in life when he had turned from the mad follies of his youth to follow in the footsteps of Christ, he remembered the shrine he had loved in childhood, and would pass many nights there in prayer and bitter meditation upon the Passion. At last touched by the sight of its crumbling walls, he set himself the task of repairing them, working so busily with stones and mortar that the chapel soon regained its former simple beauty. The Benedictines of Mount Subasio, touched by his ungrudging labour and piety, arranged with an Assisan priest to celebrate mass at the Portiuncula from time to time, and this fact drew the young saint there still oftener.

Then followed his time of ministry among the lepers of San Rufino d'Arce, when day by day so many disciples came to enlist in this new army of working beggars that the little hut in the leper-village could no longer hold them, and Francis had to think of some means of housing the brethren, and obtaining, what he had often desired, a chapel wherein they could say the Hours. (The saint, we may be sure, always said his office in the woods.) But evidently he had no particular place in his mind, not even his beloved Portiuncula, for he went first to his friend Guido, Bishop of Assisi, and then to the canons of San Rufino to ask if they could help him. They only answered that they had no church to dispose of, and could offer no advice upon the

subject. Then sorrowfully, like a man begging from door to door, St. Francis climbed Mount Subasio to lay his request in piteous terms before the benedictine abbot, where he met with more success. Brother Leo tells us that the abbot was "moved to pity, and after taking counsel with his monks, being inspired by divine grace and will, granted unto the Blessed Francis and his brethren the church of St. Mary of the Little Portion, as being the smallest and poorest church they possessed. And the abbot said to the Blessed Francis, 'Behold Brother, we grant what thou desirest. But should the Lord multiply thy brotherhood we will that this place shall be the mother-house of thy Order.'"[1]

With a willing heart Francis promised what the abbot asked, and further insisted upon paying rent for the Portiuncula, because he wished his followers always to bear in mind the point of his rule, which he so often dwelt upon, namely, that they owned no property whatever, but were only in this world as pilgrims. So every year two of his brethren brought to the gate of the benedictine monastery a basket full of roach caught in the Chiaggio which flows at no great distance from the Portiuncula, and the abbot, smiling at the simplicity of Francis, who had imagined yet another device for humility, gave back a vessel full of oil in exchange for the gift of fish.[2]

[1] *Speculum Perfectionis*, cap. lv., edited by Paul Sabatier.

[2] This custom ceased in the fifteenth century; but in the year 1899, through the piety of the Rev. Father Bernardine Ibald, it was revived. Once again the franciscans take a small basket of fish to the abbot and his monks who now live at S. Pietro in Assisi, where the benedictines went when their mountain retreat was destroyed by order of the Assisan despot, Broglia di Trino.

With great rejoicing St. Francis set to work building cells of a most simple pattern, with walls of wattle and dab, and thatched with straw, each brother inscribing his name upon a portion of the mud floor set apart for him to rest in. "And no sooner had they come to live here," writes Brother Leo, "than the Lord multiplied their number day by day, and the sweet scent of their good name spread marvellously abroad throughout all the Spoletan valley, and in many parts of the world."

It was thus that St. Mary of the Little Portion, henceforth to be the nucleus of the franciscan order, and a place familiar to pilgrims from far and near for many succeeding centuries, came into the keeping of St. Francis in the year 1211, about nine months after Innocent III had sanctioned his work among the people of Italy.

St. Francis and the brethren had been but a year in their new abode when a figure passed in among them for a moment and then was gone, leaving, as a vision to haunt them to their dying day, the memory of her beauty and soul's purity.

Never in the history of any saint has there been so touching and wondrous a scene as when the young Clare left her father's palace in Assisi to take the vows of perpetual and voluntary poverty at the altar of the Portiuncula. Followed by two trembling women, she passed swiftly through the town in the dead of night, across the fields by the slumbering village of Valecchio, and through dark woods made more sombre by the starry Umbrian sky which at intervals gleamed between the wide-spreading branches of the oak trees. The hurrying figure of the young girl, swathed in a long mantle, seemed like some spirit driven by winds towards an unknown future. One thing alone was clear to her, she was nearing

the abode of Francis Bernardone whose preaching at San Giorgio only a month before had so thrilled her, inspiring her in this strange way to seek the life he had described in such fiery words. And just as she came in sight of the Portiuncula the chanting of the brethren, which had reached her in the wood, suddenly ceased, and they came out with lighted torches in expectation of her coming. Swiftly and without a word she passed in to attend the midnight mass which Francis was to serve.

The ceremony was simple, wherein lies the charm of all things franciscan. The service over and the last blessing given, St. Francis led Clare towards the altar and with his own hands cut off her long fair hair and unclasped the jewels from her neck. But a few minutes more and a daughter of the proud house of Scifi stood clothed in the brown habit of the order, the black veil of religion falling about her shoulders, lovelier far in this nun-like severity than she had been when decked out in all her former luxury of silken gowns and precious gems.

It was arranged that Clare was to go afterwards to the benedictine nuns of San Paolo near Bastia, about an hour's walk further on in the plain. So when the final vows had been taken, St. Francis took her by the hand and they passed out of the chapel together just as dawn was breaking, while the brethren returned to their cells gazing half sadly as they passed, at the coils of golden hair and the little heap of jewels which still lay upon the altar cloth.

Those early days at the Portiuncula were among the most important of Francis' life; dreams which had come to him while he spent long hours in the caves and woods near Assisi were to be fully realised,

and the work he felt inspired to perform was to be carried out in the busy villages and cities of Italy and even further afield. All this was now very clear to Francis, and more than ever anxious to keep the simplicity of his order untouched, he taught his followers, in words which fell so gently yet so earnestly from his lips, that they were to toil without ceasing, and restlessly and without pause to wander from castle to castle, from city to city, in search of those who needed help. It may therefore at first seem strange that the "Penitents of Assisi" owning nothing but the peace within their hearts, desiring no better place for prayer than a cavern in some mountain gorge, should establish themselves near a chapel which, if not nominally their own, was practically regarded as the property of the Friars Minor. But in this again we feel the wisdom and tenderness of the saint for his little community. With all the fervour and fire of enthusiasm which impelled him like a living force to seek his end, he well knew that without some place in which to meet together and rest awhile, his followers, who however much imbued with his ardent spirit were but mortal men, would very likely fall away from the high ideal he had set before them.

Thus the Portiuncula became to the brethren as a nest, where like tired birds that long had been upon the wing, they could return after much wandering to peaceful thoughts, to prayer and quiet labour.

It is not very difficult, with the print from the "Collis Paradisi" [1] before us, and the remembrance of the large

[1] This illustration is from a print to be seen in the somewhat rare edition of the *Collis Paradisi Amænitas, seu Sacri Conventus Assisiensis Historiæ*, published in 1704 at Montefalco by Padre Angeli, and it may even have been taken from an earlier drawing. In it there is the true feeling of a franciscan convent, such as the saint hoped would continue for all time, and though there are some points which are incorrect (the

THE PORTIUNCULA IN THE TIME OF ST. FRANCIS (FROM THE "COLLIN PARADISI")

oaks which still mark the ancient Roman roads leading from Assisi to the plain, to call up the picture of the strange franciscan hamlet clustering round a pent-roofed chapel, and with only trees for a convent wall. What a life of peace in the mud huts! what a life of turmoil and angry strife raging in the city just in sight!

The spirit of those days, when monachism meant all that was purely ideal and beautiful, seems to live again. Then, day and night, each brother strove to fit himself for the work he had in view, drawing into his soul the peace and love he learned from nature herself as the forest leaves rustled above his cell or the nightingales accompanied the midnight office with their song. And when his turn came to take up the pilgrim's staff and follow the lead of Francis, he went with cheerfulness to bring to the people some of that childlike joy and lightness of heart which marked the Little Brethren through whatever land they wandered as the disciples of St. Francis.

Let us for a moment leave the Umbrian valley for the country near Oxford, where on a bitter Christmas

Church of Sta. Chiara, though curiously enough not the convent, is represented, which was built several years later than San Francesco), we get a clear idea of both Assisi and its immediate neighbourhood. All the ancient gates of the town can be made out, the Roman road from Porta Mojano to San Rufino d'Arce, a faint indication of the path to the Carceri, and also the old road from Assisi to the plain out of the gate of S. Giacomo, passing not very far from the Ponte S. Vittorino. The wall round the Portiuncula and the huts did not exist in the time of St. Francis, which, together with the wooden gate, may have been added by Brother Elias. The largest hut a little to the right of the chapel was the infirmary where St. Francis died (now called the Chapel of St. Francis), and the one behind it was his cell (now known as the Chapel of the Roses, see chapter xi. for its story), whence he could easily pass out through the woods to San Rufino d'Arce hard by.

Day, two friars were journeying upon their first mission to England.

"Going into a neighbouring wood they picked their way along a rugged path over the frozen mud and hard snow, whilst blood stained the track of their naked feet without their perceiving it. The younger friar said to the elder: 'Father, shall I sing and lighten our journey?' and on receiving permission he thundered forth a Salve Regina misericordiæ. . . . Now, when the hymn was concluded . . . he who had been the consoler said, with a kind of self congratulation to his companion: 'Brother, was not that antiphonal well sung?'"

In this simple story, told us in the chronicle of Lanercost, how true rings the franciscan note struck by Francis in those early days at the Portiuncula. He was for ever telling the brethren not to show sorrowful faces to one another, saying, as recorded by Brother Leo: "Let this sadness remain between God and thyself, and pray to Him that of His mercy He may forgive thee, and restore to thy soul His healthy joyance whereof He deprived thee as a punishment for thy sins."

It is all so long ago, and yet in reading those ancient chronicles the big church of the Angeli is for a time forgotten, and only the vision of the Portiuncula and the mud huts, with the brethren ever to and fro upon the road, remains with us as a strange picture in our modern hurried life.

But although the brethren lived so quietly in this retreat of still repose, St. Francis, ever watching over the welfare of his flock, was careful that prayer and meditation should never be an excuse for idleness, which of all vices he most abhorred. Therefore he encouraged each friar who in the world had followed some trade, to continue it here; so we hear of Beato

Egidio, on his return from one of his long journeys, seated at the door of his hut busily employed in making rush baskets, while Brother Juniper, in those rare moments when he was out of mischief, would pass his time in mending sandals with an awl he kept up his sleeve for the purpose. Besides these individual occupations there was much to attend to even in such humble dwellings as those round the Portiuncula. Sometimes there were sick friars to nurse, or vegetables had to be planted in the orchard and provisions to be obtained, while the office of doorkeeper, as "Angels" came perpetually to ask pertinent questions of the brethren, became quite a laborious task. When it fell to Brother Masseo to answer the door he had little peace. Upon one occasion he went in haste to see who was making such a noise and found a "fair youth clothed as though for a journey," so he spoke somewhat roughly, and the youth enquired how knocking should be done. "Give three knocks," quoth Brother Masseo, little dreaming he was instructing an angel in the art of knocking, "with a brief space between each knock, then wait until the brother has time to say a paternoster and to come unto thee; and if at the end of that time he does not come knock once again."

Things went smoothly enough when left to the management of such friars as Leo, Masseo or Rufino, but when one day the office of cook fell to Juniper, that dear jester of the brotherhood, we get a humorous picture of what his companions sometimes had to endure, and of the kindness with which they pardoned all shortcomings. The brethren had gone out, and Juniper being left alone devised an excellent plan whereby the convent might be supplied with food for a fortnight, and thus the cook have more time for prayer. "With all diligence," it is related in the *Fioretti*, "he went into the village and begged

for several large cooking-pots, obtained fresh meat and bacon, fowls, eggs and herbs, also he begged a quantity of firewood, and placed all these upon the fire, to wit, the fowls with their feathers on, the eggs in their shells, and the rest in like fashion. When the brethren came home, one that was well acquainted with the simplicity of Brother Juniper went into the kitchen, and seeing so many and such large pots on a great fire, sat down amazed without saying a word, and watched with what anxious care Brother Juniper did this cooking. Because of the fierceness of the fire he could not well get near to skim the pots, so he took a plank and tied it with a rope tight to his body and sprang from one pot to the other, so that it was a joy to see him. Contemplating all with great delight, this brother went forth from the kitchen and finding the other brothers, said: "In sooth I tell you, Brother Juniper is making a marriage feast."

Then in hurried Juniper, all red with his exertions and the heat of the fire, explaining the excellent plan he had devised; and as he set his mess upon the table he praised it, saying: "Now these fowls are nourishing to the brain, this stew will refresh the body, it is so good"; but the stew remained untasted, for, says the *Fioretti*, "there is no pig in the land of Rome so famished that he would eat of it."

At the end of any foolish adventure Brother Juniper would always ask pardon with such humility that he edified his companions and all the people he came in contact with, instead of annoying them with his childish pranks. His goodness was manifest, and St. Francis was often heard to say to those who wished to reprove him after one of his wildest frolics, "would that I had a whole forest of these junipers."

Between the men who lived at the Portiuncula with the saint, and those who in later times ruled large con-

vents in the cities, the contrast is so great that we would wish to draw still further from these inexhaustible chronicles which reveal so charmingly the life of these Umbrian friars. But to tell of all the events connected with the Portiuncula would mean recounting the history of the whole franciscan brotherhood, and we must now pass over many years to that saddest year of all, when St. Francis was brought to die in the place he had so carefully tended.

Knowing that he had but a few more weeks of life, he begged the brethren to find some means to carry

NERICHSEN.

ASSISI FROM THE PLAIN

him away from the Bishop's Palace at Assisi where he had been staying some time. "Verily," he told them pathetically, "because of my very infirmity I cannot go afoot"; so they carried him in their arms down the hill to the plain, and when they came to the hospital of San Salvatore dei Crociferi they laid him gently down upon the ground with his face towards Assisi, because he desired to bless the town for the last time before he died.

The blind saint, lifting his hand in blessing, pronounced these words dear to the hearts of the Assisans to this day: "Blessed be thou of the Lord, O city, faithful to God, because through thee many souls shall

be saved. The servants of the Most High shall dwell in great numbers within thy walls, and many of thy sons shall be chosen for the realms of heaven."

Then they carried him to the hut nearest the Portiuncula which was the infirmary, and here his last days were passed.[1] Although he suffered acutely, they were days of marvellous peace and joy. It is beautiful to read how, with his usual tenderness, he thought of the brethren he was leaving to carry on the work without him, encouraging them all as they stood weeping round his bed. Like Isaac of old, the Umbrian patriarch blessed his first born, Bernard of Quintavalle, saying: "Come my little son that my soul may bless thee before I die," while he enjoined upon all to love and honour Bernard, who had been the first to listen to his words now so many years ago. With all his sons near him St. Francis dictated his will, wherein he describes the way of life they were to lead, and which, coming from him at this solemn moment, must always remain as a precious message from the saint, in many ways of more importance than the Rule approved in his life-time by Pope Honorius. When this was done he commended once again to their special care the chapel of the Portiuncula. "I will," he said to them, "that for all times it be the mirror and good example of all religion, and as it were a lamp ever burning and resplendent before the throne of God and before the Blessed Virgin."

The farewells to those of his immediate circle had been made and a letter written to St. Clare, and now he wished to bid "the most noble Roman matron, Madonna Giacoma dei Settesoli," one of his most

[1] For fuller account see *The Mirror of Perfection*, translated by Sebastian Evans, caps. 107, 108, 112, and *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, translated by J. W Arnold (Temple Classics), chap. vi.

devoted followers, to come and take leave of him at Assisi. The letter had only just been written when knocking at the door and the sound of horses trampling was heard outside, and the brethren going out to discover the cause of such unwonted noise found that Madonna Giacoma, accompanied by her sons, two Roman senators, had been inspired to come and visit the dying saint.

The brethren, somewhat averse to allow a woman, even one so renowned for holiness as Madonna Giacoma, to enter their sacred precincts, called to St. Francis in their doubt: "Father, what shall be done? Shall we let her enter and come unto thee?" And the Blessed Francis said: "The regulation is to be set aside in respect to this lady whose great faith and devotion hath brought her hither from such far-off parts." So Madonna Giacoma came into the presence of the Blessed Francis weeping bitterly, and she brought with her the shroud-cloth, incense, and a great quantity of wax for the candles which were to burn before his body after death. She had even thought of some cakes made of almonds and sugar, known in Rome by the name of *mostaccioli*, which she had often made for him when he visited her. But the saint was fast failing, and could eat but little of the cakes.

As the end came nearer his thoughts were drawn away from earth, and true to the last to his Lady Poverty, he caused himself to be laid naked on the ground as a token of his complete renouncement of the world. His face radiant with happiness, he kept asking his companions to recite the Canticle of the Sun, often joining in it himself or breaking forth into his favourite psalm *Voce mea ad Domimum Clamavi.*

With words of praise and gladness the Blessed Francis of Assisi, the spouse of Poverty, died in a mud

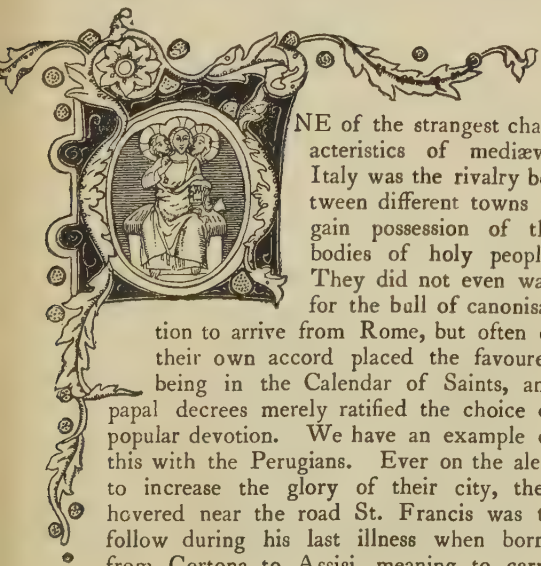
hut close to the shrine he loved, on the 3rd of October of 1226 in the forty-fifth year of his age.

His soul was seen to ascend to heaven under the semblance of a star, but brilliant as the sun, upon clouds as white as snow. It was sunset, the hour when in Umbria after the stillness of a warm autumn day an unusual tremor passes through the land and all things in the valley and upon the hill-sides are stirred by it, when a flight of larks circled above the roof of the hut where the saint lay at rest. And these birds of light and gladness "seemed by their sweet singing to be in company with Francis praising the Lord God."

CHAPTER IV

The building of the Basilica and Convent of San Francesco. The Story of Brother Elias

"O brother mine, O beautiful brother, O brother of love, build me a castle which shall have neither stone nor iron. O beautiful brother, build me a city which shall have neither wood nor stone."—BEATO EGIDIO.



ONE of the strangest characteristics of mediæval Italy was the rivalry between different towns to gain possession of the bodies of holy people. They did not even wait for the bull of canonisation to arrive from Rome, but often of their own accord placed the favoured being in the Calendar of Saints, and papal decrees merely ratified the choice of popular devotion. We have an example of this with the Perugians. Ever on the alert to increase the glory of their city, they hovered near the road St. Francis was to follow during his last illness when borne from Cortona to Assisi, meaning to carry

him off by force so that he might die in Perugia.[1] Never at a loss for a way out of any difficulty Elias hastily changed the itinerary for the journey, and instead of the short way by lake Thrasymene he took the much longer and more difficult road by Gualdo and Nocera, far back in the mountains to the north of Assisi. He warned the Assisans of the peril run by the little company of friars with their sick father, and soldiers were immediately sent to escort them safely to the Bishop's Palace where St. Francis stayed until carried to the Portiuncula when he knew that he was dying.

They were sad days at Assisi when St. Francis was borne through the city blind and ill; and as he stretched out his hands to bless the people they bowed their heads and wept at the sight of so much suffering. Now that the end had come and they knew he lay safely in the little shrine of the Portiuncula, their mourning was changed into rejoicing, and as though they were preparing for a great festival, strange sounds of busy talk, of laughter and of singing were heard in the streets. Had a stranger found himself at Assisi that Sunday morning he might well have asked: "What victory have you gained to merit all this show of gladness, or what emperor are you going forth to greet?" And the answer would have been: "Francis, our saint, the son of Bernardone, returned to us when he was nigh to death, and now that he is dead we possess his body which will bring great honour and fame to our city by reason of the many miracles to be wrought at his tomb."

The sun had not yet risen when the Assisans left

[1] In the same way when Beato Egidio, ill and nigh his end, wished to return to the Portiuncula to die in the place he loved so well, the Perugians refused their consent and even placed soldiers round the monastery of Monte Ripido to prevent his escape.

their houses and thronged down the hill to the Portiuncula to bring the precious burden to rest within the more certain refuge of their walled town. "Blessed and praised be the Lord our God who has entrusted to us, though unworthy, so great a gift. Praise and glory to the ineffable Trinity," they sang as they hurried along in the cold dawn. Trumpeters blew loud and discordant notes, nearly drowning the voices of the priests who vainly in the din tried to intone the canticles and psalms. The nobles came from their castles with lighted torches to join the procession, the peasants from the hills brought sprigs of olive, and those from the forests stripped the oaks of their finest branches which they waved above their heads, while children strewed the ground with flowers.

Amidst all this stirring show of joy a kindly thought had been taken of St. Clare and her nuns, so that when the body of St. Francis had been laid in a coffin, and the long line of friars, priests and townsmen turned to climb the hill, they took a path skirting just below the town, through the vineyards and olive groves, to the convent of San Damiano. The sound of chanting must have warned the watchers of their approach long before they came in sight. An artist has pictured the nuns like a flock of timid sheep in his fresco, trooping out of an exquisitely marbled chapel, with St. Clare endeavouring to suppress her grief as she bends over the dead Francis, while the sisters press close behind her. This is how it ought to have been; but, alas, only an iron lattice, through which the nuns were wont to receive the Holy Communion, was opened for them, and the friars lifting the body of St. Francis from the coffin, held it in their arms at the opening as one by one the nuns came to kiss the pierced hands. "Madonna Chiara's" tears fell fast as she

gazed on him who had brought such joy into her cloistered solitude. "Oh father, father," she murmured, "what are we to do now that thou hast abandoned us unhappy ones? With thee departs all consolation, for buried here away from the world there is none to console us." Restraining the lamentations which filled her heart she passed like a shadow out of sight to her cell, and when all the sisters had bidden farewell to St. Francis, the small window was closed "never again to open upon so sad a scene."

The people, who until now had wept bitterly, began to sing again as the procession went on its way up the hill towards the Porta Mojano. The trumpets sounded louder than ever, and "with jubilation and great exultation" the sacred body was brought to the church of San Giorgio, where it was carefully laid in a marble urn covered with an iron grating, and guarded day and night from the prying eyes of the Perugians. If Francis had worked miracles during his life, those chronicled at his tomb are even more marvellous; in recounting some which read like fairy tales, a biographer recounts with pride that, "even from heaven, the Saint showed his courtesy to all."

Devotion to St. Francis was not confined to Umbria or even to Italy, for we read how his fame spread throughout France, and how the King and Queen with all the barons of the land, came to Paris to kiss one of his relics. "People journeyed from the east and from the west," enthusiastically exclaims Celano with a total disregard of detail, "they came from the north and from the south, even the learned and the lettered who abounded in Paris at that time."

But while France was being stirred by the news of perpetual miracles and prodigies wrought through the intercession of the saint, and Assisi in consequence was fast growing into a place of great importance

in the world, Pope Gregory IX, who had been lately elected upon the death of Honorius III, spent many hours in the Cannonica at Perugia wrestling with his doubts concerning the truth of the greatest miracle of all, the miracle of the Stigmata. While in this state of uncertainty and perplexity St. Francis, the *Fioretti* relates, appeared to him one night, and showed him the five wounds inflicted by the Seraph upon his hands, feet and side. The vision, it seems, dispelled all doubt from the mind of Pope Gregory, for in conclave with the cardinals he proclaimed the sanctity of his friend, the Poverello d'Assisi, and determined to set the final seal of the church upon his miracles and fame.

This vision was the prelude of a great ceremony held a few days later in San Giorgio for the canonisation of Francis, at which all Umbria seems to have been present. Pope Gregory, clothed in vestments of cloth of gold embroidered with precious stones, his tiara "almost as an aureole of sanctity about his head," sat stiffly on his pontifical throne like some carved image, surrounded by cardinals in crimson garments and bishops in white stoles. All eyes were fixed upon this splendid group, and it is not improbable that among the spectators stood Pietro Bernardone and Madonna Pica, and many who had reviled Francis in his early days of sanctity, and now, within two years of his death, witnessed him placed among the greatest of the saints. Gregory had prepared an eloquent address, which he delivered in a sonorous voice occasionally broken by sobs of emotion. Becoming more and more enthusiastic as he proceeded, he compared Francis to a full moon, a refulgent sun, a star rising above the morning mists, and when he had finished the pious homily, a subdeacon read out a list of the saint's miracles, and a learned cardinal, "not without copious weeping," dis-

coursed thereon, while the Pope listened, shedding "rivers of tears," and breaking forth every now and then into deep-drawn sighs. The prelates wept so devoutly that their vestments were in great part wet, and the ground was drenched with their tears. The ceremony ended when the Pope rose to bless the people, and intoned the *Te Deum*, in which all joined with such good will that the "earth resounded in great jubilee."

Had St. Francis foreseen how his humility would be rewarded? This we know, that he in part had realised how his order would slip away from his ideal, and there is a deep note of sadness in many pages of his life, showing us how fully he realised the pitfalls his disciples were likely to fall into when he was no longer there to watch over them with tender care. Often while he was absent for only a little time the brethren forgot his simple rule, building cells and houses too spacious and pretentious for the home of the Lady Poverty. This had been one of the signs to him that his earnest prayers to God, his example and admonitions to his followers, which come to us through his letters and the pages of Brother Leo like the cry of one who bravely fought against the inevitable, were all to be in vain. It is a tragic story, and rendered still more so by the fact that the Saint's last years should have been saddened by this knowledge of coming events.

Only a little while and the teaching of poverty and obscurity which he had so deeply implanted in the hearts of his followers was to be completely swept away; upon the ruins of that first franciscan order, guarded jealously for a time by a faithful few, arose the new franciscan spirit which Elias Buonbarone, inspired by the will of Gregory IX, brought into being almost before the echo of his master's words had died away.

It is not for us in this small space to trace the many changes that crept into the young community, but we simply note as a fact, what to some may appear exaggerated, that the order St. Francis founded, and prayed would continue as he left it, ceased at his death, while the order that grew up afterwards bore the unmistakable stamp of Elias and the Vatican.

The extraordinary humility of St. Francis gave rise to the myth that when he lay dying at the Portiuncula he expressed a strong desire to be buried in the most despised spot near Assisi, which, because criminals were said to have been executed there, bore the name of Colle del Inferno. It seems unlike him to have been concerned with what might become of "brother body" after death, and it was probably not until Gregory IX conceived the idea of building a church in honour of his friend, that a suitable burial-place was searched for near the walls of the town, if not actually within them, where the citizens could safely guard the precious relics. Everything favoured the designs of Gregory, for not only was he fortunate in finding a man like Elias, capable, prompt and energetic, but the one place suited for the erection of a great church, happened to be in the possession of a generous citizen of Assisi. No sooner were the wishes of the Pontiff made known than Simon Puzzarelli offered his land on the Collis Inferni, which from this time forward Gregory ordered to be called Collis Paradisi, the Hill of Paradise.[1]

A document, duly sealed and signed, is still in the Assisan archives, in which we read how the site for the

[1] In the illustrations on p. 38 and p. 107 is shown the gallows erected where now stands the franciscan basilica, but it is unlikely that the property of a private individual should have been used for such a purpose, and Collis Inferni may simply have meant the spur of hill beneath the upper portion of Assisi upon which the castle stood.

building of "an oratory or church for the most holy body of St. Francis" was given over, in words that admitted of no withdrawal, to Elias as representative of the Lord Pope Gregory IX—"dedit, tradedit, cesset, delegavit et donavit simpliciter et irrevocabiliter." Now the use of the word *oratory* is a remarkable fact as suggesting that at the beginning the Assisans little dreamed of the erection of a great basilica which would cast their cathedral entirely into the shade.

A few days after the ceremony of the canonisation of St. Francis, Pope Gregory, amid the usual crowd of Umbrian spectators, laid the foundation-stone of the franciscan basilica. Then being recalled by his Roman subjects, whom Assisan chroniclers describe as "a race of men most seditious and fierce," he was obliged to hurry south, leaving Elias to carry out his wishes as he thought best.

So far the task left to Elias was easy enough, for money was not lacking, and countless workmen were ready to begin the great enterprise; but the question of who should design a church upon the site chosen was a more difficult matter to settle, as Vasari tells us: "There was a great scarcity of good architects at this time, and the church, having to be built upon a very high hill, at the base of which flows a torrent called the Tescio, an excellent artist was required for the work. After much deliberation a certain Maestro Jacopo Tedesco was called to Assisi as being the best architect then to be found, and having examined the site, and consulted the wishes of the fathers, who were holding a Chapter in Assisi to discuss the matter, he designed the plan of a very beautiful church and convent."[1]

"Jacopo" is said to have come to Italy in the retinue of the Emperor Frederick II. Vasari recounts

[1] See Vasari, *Life of Arnolfo di Lapo.*

that the fame he gained all over Italy by his work at Assisi was so great that the Florentines summoned him to build them bridges and palaces, and "Jacopo," charmed with the Tuscan city, married and dwelt there. The citizens, following a custom which still continues in every Italian town, changed his name to Lapo, and he is revealed to us as father of the famous Arnolfo di Lapo, architect of the Florentine cathedral and of the Palazzo della Signoria. In the seductive pages of Vasari the account reads so pleasantly that it seems a pity later writers should have discovered that the story rests upon uncertain dates and legends. Vasari's endeavour to amalgamate three artists into one person, have forced many to the opposite extreme, until even the existence of "Jacopo Tedesco" is denied, and they are reduced to speak of *an* architect who designed the church and convent of San Francesco.[1]

Such is the irony of fate, that while numerous documents remain giving the names of contractors and minor masons employed in the building there is absolutely no evidence or clue of any kind as to

[1] It would be a thankless task to follow the bewildering maze of contradictory evidence which has enveloped the question as to who built San Francesco. Those who are eager to do so, however, can consult Henry Thode's exhaustive work, *Franz von Assisi* (beginning p. 187), which deals most thoroughly with the subject. Leader Scott also, in her learned book upon *The Cathedral Builders*, gives some ingenious theories with regard to "Jacopo" and his supposed relationship with Arnolfo, p. 315-316.

Another book is *I Maestri Comacini*, by Professore Marzario, whose statements about "Jacopo's" nationality are interesting and probable. But, following Vasari a little too blindly, he gives us the startling fact that "Jacopo" died in 1310, this, even supposing him to have been only twenty-five when he was at Assisi as chief architect, would make him one hundred and fifteen years of age at the time of his death.

the architect employed by Elias. We can only suppose that the document relating to this and other interesting points in connection with the decoration of the church, must have been destroyed by the Perugians when they sacked Assisi under Jacopo Piccinino and burnt so many treasures in the archives. We are consequently at the mercy of local legends, which were no doubt recounted to Vasari by the Assisans themselves when he visited the town in the middle of the sixteenth century. But there is still the evidence of our own eye to help us to know something of the builder of San Francesco, the builder of the first Gothic church in Italy. We are told he was a German; but then we know from Mr Fergusson's Handbook of Architecture that Germans were only just awakening to the Gothic influences at the time of St. Francis's death, and, when they wished to build churches in the new style they called in French masons to help them. Was it therefore likely that Germany should have given the mysterious architect to Assisi? A church recalling the Assisan Basilica may be vainly searched for in Germany or in Lombardy and this further fact inclines us to believe in the theory of M. Edouard Corroyer.

Whether the man who conceived the original idea of raising one church above another flanked by a colonnaded convent on the spur of a great mountain was called Philip or James, or whether he came from a Lombard or a German province seems of small importance compared with the country where he learned his art. Even supposing "Jacopo" to have been a northern Italian from the home of the Comacine Guild of master masons, which is extremely likely, everything goes to prove that he must have drawn his inspiration for the Assisan Basilica straight

CHURCH AND CONVENT OF SAN FRANCESCO

from the south of France. What establishes the French parentage of San Francisco is the mode of construction, especially visible in the Upper Church, and which, as M. Corroyer says, "possesses all the characteristics peculiar to the French architecture in the south of France at the close of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century, of which the Cathedral of Albi [in Aquitaine] is the most perfect type. The single nave, its buttresses projecting externally in the form of half turrets, add to the likeness of the Italian church of Assisi with that of Albi in France."[1] A glance at the illustrations of the two churches will bear this theory out better than many words; and it will be seen at once that had the half turrets between the bay windows of San Francesco been completed with pointed roofs and small lancet windows, as no doubt was the intention, the likeness would be even more striking.

Although "Jacopo" left a very substantial mark of his genius upon the Umbrian hill-side, he came and went like a shadow, leaving his designs and plans to be carried on by his young disciple Fra Filippo Campello, whom we shall meet with again in the chapter on Santa Chiara. Little, therefore, as we know of this earlier portion of its history, San Francesco at least remains to us in all its first prime and glory to tell its own tale, and endless should be the hymn of praise sung by the Assisans for the chance which brought so beautiful a creation within their walls.

It seems indeed strange that a style so new and so admired, was not more faithfully adhered to at a time when cathedrals and churches were being erected in every Italian city. Perhaps the Romanesque and

[1] *L'Architecture Gothique* par M. Edouard Corroyer. See pp. 96 and 105.

Byzantine influences from the south so tempered the Gothic tendencies of Lombard architects, that they were unable to attain the true ideal, and succeeded only in creating a style of their own, to be found at Florence, Siena and Orvieto, known as Italian Gothic. Thus it happens that the Assisans are the proud possessors, not only of the first Gothic church built in Italy during the dawn of the new era, but of a church which is unique, as recalling less dimly than those of other cities the splendour of the northern cathedrals.

The rapidity with which the Assisan Basilica progressed is one of the most wonderful results of the love inspired by St. Francis among mediæval Christians. The generosity of the Catholic world was so stirred that donations poured in without ceasing from Germany and France, and even from Jerusalem and Morocco. "Cardinals, bishops, dukes, princes, counts and barons," write the chroniclers, helped Elias in his work, while the people of Umbria, too poor to give money, came in numbers, out of the reverence they bore the Saint, to work for small and often for no wages. It was a busy time; and Assisi awoke to a sense of her importance. Under the vigilant eye of Elias, armies of masons and labourers worked as unremittingly as ants at a nest, while processions of carts drawn by white oxen, went ever to and fro upon the road leading to the quarries, bringing creamy-white, rose and golden-coloured blocks of Subasian stone.

This universal enthusiasm enabled Elias to complete the Lower Church in twenty-two months, while the Upper Church was roofed in six years later, and finished in all essential details by 1253. But while Elias was applauded by most people, a few of the franciscans, headed by Fra Leo, still clung to the letter of the

franciscan rule, and bitterly disapproved of these innovations. They sorrowfully looked on at the army of workers, raising, as if by magic, walls and colonnades upon the hill-side and towers ever higher against the sky. They watched blocks of marble and stone being chiselled into cornices, friezes and capitals ornamented with foliage and flowers, until, with despair in their hearts, they slowly returned to their mud huts in the plain. The dreams of Francis were vanishing fast as the allegiance to the Lady Poverty diminished. Now her shrine existed only in the Carceri, in San Damiano and in the Portiuncula, where few sought her company, for all eyes were turned towards the new Basilica. The words of the Master, recorded faithfully in Leo's biography, were ever ringing in his ears: "Set a good hedge round in lieu of a wall, as a sign of holy poverty and humility . . . build poor little cells of mud and wood, and other cells where at times the brethren may pray and work to the gain of virtue and the avoidance of sloth. Also cause small churches to be built; they ought not to raise great churches for the sake of preaching to the people, or for any other reason, for they will show greater humility and give a better example by going to preach in other churches. And if by chance prelates, clerics, religious or seculars should come to these abodes, the poor houses, the little cells and small churches will be better sermons and cause greater edification to them than many words." [1]

No wonder that Leo and his friends watched Elias at his work with no friendly eye, for between the mud huts which Francis had planned with so much simplicity, and the massive Basilica and palatial convent, stretched an infinite chasm, separating the old order from the new.

They were still more unhappy and scandalised when

[1] *Speculum Perfectionis.* Edited by Paul Sabatier, cap. x.

Elias, who had the full permission of Gregory IX. for this innovation, placed a marble vase outside San Francesco to receive the contributions of those anxious to see the church quickly finished. A curious account is given by a latin chronicler of the warfare which ensued between the standard-bearers of the new and the old franciscan spirit: "Some brothers of marvellous sanctity and purity went to Perugia to consult Brother Egidio, a good and pious man, concerning the erection of so large a building and the manner of collecting money, which seemed to be expressly against the rule. And Brother Egidio answered them: "If that building were to reach from Assisi to here [to Perugia] a little corner would suffice for me to dwell in." And they having asked him what he thought about the vase, he said, turning to Brother Leo: "If thou considerest thyself already dead [to the world and its persecutions] go and break it. But if thou livest, stay thy hand, for perchance thou mayest not be able to bear the persecution of that Brother Elias."[1] Hearing this, Brother Leo went with his companions and broke the vase to pieces. Then Brother Elias, hearing this, had them severely beaten by his servants, and drove them from Assisi in great confusion. For this reason a great tumult arose among the brethren. Because of these aforesaid excesses, and because Brother Elias threatened the complete destruction of the rule, when the brethren met in general Chapter they deprived him of the office of Vicar General, and unanimously elected Brother John of Florence [Giovanni Parenti].[2]

But these murmurs were drowned in the din of public applause which enabled Elias to work in his

[1] For the Latin text see p. c. of M. Paul Sabatier's introduction to his edition of the *Speculum Perfectionis*.

[2] Giovanni Parenti, who does not stand out very clearly in the history of the Order, was a Florentine magistrate of Città

own way, unscrupulously dispersing every difficulty without any reference to the rule of St. Francis.

He continued to be the presiding spirit at Assisi, and such was the success of his untiring energy that by the month of May 1230, the Lower Church of the Basilica was ready to receive the "most sacred body" of the Saint, while the magnificent quarters in the adjoining convent were ready for those friars who belonged to the moderate party, and approved of the new order of things.

Pope Gregory was unable to visit Assisi at this time owing to difficulties with his unruly Roman subjects, but he sent innumerable indulgences, golden crosses studded with precious stones containing relics of the true cross, vases of silver and gold, and a large sum of money for the further advancement of the building. These generous gifts were followed by a Brief, which in calmer moments the monks might have viewed with irritation, declaring both Basilica and convent to be immediately subject to the Holy See. The franciscan order was fast becoming a Papal institution, to be patronised and ruled by succeeding Pontiffs.

While Giovanni Parenti was preparing for the Conclave to be held in the spacious rooms of the new convent, the wily Elias was holding secret councils with the magistrates of the town as to ensuring the safe conduct of the body of St. Francis to the Basilica. The number of people continually arriving in anticipation of the coming ceremony made them somewhat uneasy, and their doubts were carefully discussed in the Communal Palace. They came to the conclusion

di Castello, one of the first towns to feel the influence of St. Francis. There he heard of the new movement which so rapidly was spreading throughout Western Europe, and, together with many of the citizens, became converted through the teaching of the Umbrian saint.

that if the exact place of the saint's sepulchre was known, there would always be the danger of its being rifled by the citizens of neighbouring towns, especially by the Perugians, whose partiality for relics was well known. So a stratagem, most likely invented by the fertile brain of Elias, was decided upon and succeeded admirably.

The friars and citizens, unconscious of the plot hatched in their midst, were all eager for the day of the Translation. The Umbrians left their towns empty to assist at the great spectacle, and their number was so great, that, failing to find room within the walls of Assisi, they wandered like droves of cattle on the hills above trying to obtain a sight of the procession. It was a great day in the annals of Assisi; outside the little church of San Giorgio a triumphal car, drawn by a pair of magnificent oxen, their whiteness almost hidden beneath purple draperies and their horns wreathed and garlanded with flowers, stood waiting for the holy burden. Three Papal Legates and Elias placed the heavy sarcophagus with their own hands upon the car, covering it over with a piece of rich brocaded silk sent for the occasion by the mother of King Louis of France. They kept close to the car all the time, while the brethren, holding palms and torches, formed a long procession followed by the bishops and their clergy, and the Podestà with his retinue of crimson-robed priors. It was the month of May, and from every garden and terrace the nobles and their ladies showered flowers over the "sacred ark" as it was borne slowly up the street amidst the deafening sound of trumpets and the cheers of the populace. All that could be done to honour St. Francis had been thought of; Gregory IX. had even composed a hymn to be sung on that day in which the "Poverello" was compared to Christ. They were

in the midst of the hymn of praise and quite close to the new Basilica when the heavy tramp of numerous armed men was suddenly heard; swiftly a passage was made through the crowd, who for the moment fell back amazed and powerless, while the soldiers hurried with the sarcophagus into the church, closely followed by Elias, who promptly shut and barred the door. After the first moment of surprise, a wild burst of indignation arose from the thousands who were thus deprived of a spectacle which they had come miles to see. They howled like wild beasts baulked of their prey, banging at the doors of the church in their fury; but silence reigned within, for Elias and his accomplices were stealthily engaged in hiding the body of St. Francis in the very bowels of the mountain, where for five centuries it remained unseen and undisturbed.

Till far into the night the people continued to murmur; the bewildered friars asked each other what this strange behaviour of Elias meant, and the only people who preserved any appearance of calmness were Messer il Podestà of Assisi and his priors, who smiled to see how well the plot had worked. It was not long before the scandal reached the ears of Pope Gregory. The enemies of Elias painted the story in glowing colours, and the Pope expressed himself greatly shocked at sacrilegious hands having been laid upon the holy body of the saint. He blamed the magistrates for allowing such a tumult to arise, and called upon them to give due explanation of their conduct within a fortnight at the court of Rome under pain of their city being laid under an interdict. The Pope's Brief caused consternation, and his accusations of their ingratitude for past favour rankled deeply. We are not told how the anger of the Pope was pacified, but no doubt both Elias and the Podestà explained satisfactorily the reasons for so strange a burial, as Assisi continued

to enjoy the patronage of the Holy See. The efforts of Elias to ensure the safety of the body of St. Francis had been eminently successful, and Gregory could hardly fail to pardon the unusual manner in which this had been obtained.

Out of the mysterious events of that day of tumult grew a legend which lasted until the body of St. Francis was finally discovered five centuries later. It was believed that a church far surpassing the other two in grandeur and beauty had been built beneath them by Elias, and that St. Francis risen from his tomb stood in the midst, his hands crossed upon his breast, his head thrown back, gazing eternally towards the sky. The Umbrians, refusing to believe that their saint could suffer the common lot of mortals, loved to think of him as "almost alive," waiting for the last call, surrounded by the glorious beauty of a hidden church which they had never seen and only dimly pictured to themselves. Vasari refers to this "invisible church" described to him by the awe-struck citizens, when he mentions that "the tomb containing the body of the glorious saint is in the lowest church where no one enters, and whose doors are walled up"; and in the beginning of his description of the Basilica, he speaks of three ranges of buildings placed one above the other, the lowest of all being subterranean, which is curious as showing how closely he followed tradition regarding the Assisan church. Padre Angeli so unhesitatingly accepted the story that in his "Collis Paradisi" he drew from imagination a plan, together with a picture of the "invisible church." It represents a long vaulted hall somewhat recalling the architecture of the Upper Church, at the end of which is St. Francis standing upon his tomb in a recess corresponding to a kind of choir; the vaulted roof is supported by slender columns with chiselled capitals,

and the walls and floor are ornamented with marbles and mosaic of different colours.

. . . . . .

To close this chapter without touching upon the career of Elias, who is at once the black sheep of the franciscan order and one of the greatest citizens of Assisi, would be impossible. Few have written calmly about him, trying either to exculpate him or blaming his actions too severely, so that it is difficult to obtain any just idea of the real motives which guided him in an ill-starred life. Elias was neither devil nor saint, though he possessed the energy of both and his marked and domineering character would have fitted him better for the world than for the cloister. Ambition seems to have been his chief fault, together with a certain proud reserve which kept him aloof from his companions. From the various references to him in the early biographies of St. Francis we feel the writers failed ever to come quite in touch with one so outside their lives, and whom they considered as a kind of Judas—for did he not betray the interests of the Master?

"Elias is an altogether different type of man from the simple-minded Francis," writes Mrs Oliphant, echoing the general opinion. "He is an ambitious and ascetic churchman, of the class which has pushed Rome into much power and many abuses—an almost conventional development of the intellectual monk, making up for compulsory humbleness in external matters by the highest strain of ecclesiastical ambition and spiritual pride."

But while all abused him, none doubted his very exceptional talents, and even in the *Fioretti* he was accounted "one of the most learned men in the world," and St. Francis showed the great confidence he had in him by naming him Vicar-General after the

death of Peter Cataneo. It was at a Chapter held in the wood by the Portiuncula that the saint expressed his desire to again resign the government of the order to another, and while Elias discoursed to the assembled friars St. Francis sat at his feet listening attentively to every word.[1] On the other hand, the saint was quite aware of his faults, and from the *Fioretti*, where Elias is pictured for artistic effect in strong colours as the wicked friar, we seem to realize the strain that often must have come between these two very different men. Thus we read that it being revealed to St. Francis that Elias was destined to lose his soul and bring dishonour on the order, he conceived such an antipathy towards him that he would even avoid meeting him, although at the time they were living in the same convent. The scene when Elias, discovering the reason of his displeasure, threw himself at the feet of the saint to implore his intercession with heaven reveals in the most touching way the great belief and reverence inspired by St. Francis in the heart of the least docile of his followers. "I have so great a faith in thy prayers," said Elias, "that were I in the midst of hell, and thou wert to pray to God for me, I should feel some relief; therefore again I pray thee to commend me, a sinner, unto God who came to save sinners that He may receive me into His mercy." And this did Brother Elias say with much devotion and many tears, so that St. Francis, like a pitying father, promised to pray to God for him. It will be seen how far the revelation of St. Francis came true, and the manner in which his prayer was answered.

[1] It is impossible in this small book to give any idea of the various influences at work upon the young franciscan order during the life of the saint. I can only refer my readers to the charming pages of M. Paul Sabatier, who gives us a vivid picture of these early days in *La Vie de Saint François*, and in his introduction to the *Speculum Perfectionis*.

So long as Elias remained under the influence of Francis his pride was tempered, and his ambition curbed, but when cast upon his own resources he gave full rein to the ideas which had no doubt been forming in his mind for some years past. Elias thought the franciscan order, if faithful to the Lady Poverty, would prove of small importance; and he therefore willingly leagued with Gregory IX. to mould it so that it should become a visible power upon the earth. The vision he conjured up with the sceptre in his own hand was very fair; and he failed to see why religion should not be served quite as well within the massive convent walls he had helped to rear, as when dwelling in a mud hut. He had too broad a mind to look closely to the detail of his rule; he only saw the broad outline of his master's teaching; and who can say whether after all he was not right? This we know, the mud huts have long since vanished, while thousands come each year to pray at the tomb of Francis within sight of Giotto's master-pieces. They sing aloud his praises, and as they pray and sing throw coppers and silver in heaps upon the altar steps, and pass out of the church into the sunlight again, knowing little of the lessons St. Francis spent his life in teaching.

But we must return again to Elias and his many troubles with the franciscan world. While patronized by Pope Gregory, he also seems to have had a strong party of monks on his side, probably those who had joined the Order during the last few years. Their names have not come down to us, and their personalities have merged in that of Elias who thus led them forward on a somewhat perilous way. They began by attempting to depose Giovanni Parenti while he was holding a Chapter in the new convent, a few days after the ceremony of the Translation of

the body of St. Francis to the Basilica. His friars were gathered round him discussing the various missions to be undertaken, and the work that had been done during the past year, when the door was thrown open and a crowd of excited friars with Elias at their head appeared upon the threshold. Before anyone could realize what this strange apparition meant, Elias was borne rapidly along by his companions and installed in the seat of Giovanni Parenti, while a scene of indescribable tumult arose among those whose indignation had not yet cooled down after the events of the past week. It is said that St. Anthony of Padua was present at this conclave, and vainly tried to calm the excitement, but his voice was drowned in the clamour. At last, driven to despair, Giovanni Parenti began to cry aloud and tear his garments as one distraught; he could not have hit upon a better plan, for where words had failed this piece of dramatic acting produced an instantaneous effect. His friars formed a vanguard round him, acclaiming him Vicar-General as they beat back the intruders with hard blows and angry scowls. Elias, seeing the game was lost, threw himself on the ground, and with expressions of deep contrition implored forgiveness. He was pardoned, but banished to a distant hermitage, where humbled and sad he pondered for many months upon his next move. He allowed his hair and beard to grow to such a length that even his enemies began to believe his repentance was sincere, and only two years after his misconduct we find him elected Vicar-General in the place of his former rival, and, under the title of Guardian and Master of the Basilica and Convent, in full command of the works at San Francesco.

He now enjoyed a season of peace and plenty in the comfortable quarters of the franciscan convent, and is said to have gathered a household about him sur-

passing the splendour of a cardinal's court. Fra Illuminato di Rieti (afterwards Bishop of Assisi) acted as his secretary, writing numberless letters to "the Pope and the Princes of the World," for Elias was in correspondence with more than one crowned head and paid many visits to distant courts in quest of money for the Assisan Church. On these journeys he always went on horseback, and even when going from one church to another in Umbria, he was well mounted on a "fat and stout palfrey," to the intense scandal of some of the friars. "He also had secular servants," writes an indignant chronicler, "all dressed in divers colours like to those of bishops, who ministered to him in all things." His food was always good, and he had the reputation of keeping an excellent cook.

This peaceful and successful period of his life was of short duration, for he soon fell into dire trouble and disgrace. It was his misfortune to be sent by Pope Gregory, who trusted implicitly in his discretion and ability, on a mission to Frederic II, in the hopes of bringing the Emperor to a sense of his misdoings. A disciple of St. Francis seemed to be the right person to send as an emissary of peace; but instead of the orthodox humble and barefooted friar, we read of him as a very haughty personage, quite at his ease in the political world, then ringing with the angry cries of Guelph and Ghibelline.

No sooner had Elias reached the franciscan convent at Parma than the magnates of the city, aware of the errand he had come upon, assembled to do him honour. Fra Salimbene, who was present at the interview, describes how Elias waited for his visitors, his head swathed in an Armenian turban, and comfortably seated upon a soft chair drawn close to a huge fire. When Gherardo da Correggio, known as "Messer il Podestà of the big teeth,"

entered the room, Elias remained seated, and to the astonishment of all in no way disturbed himself for his illustrious guest. The Podestà very sensibly took no offence, but passed the matter over by expressing his wonder that the Vicar-General should have chosen so cold a season for his visit to Lombardy—a glance at the fire had told him that this franciscan friar liked comfort as much as most people.

There is no detailed account of the interview of Elias with the Emperor to inform us whether he behaved at it with the same easy familiarity; all we know is that Frederic, "the wonder of the world," and Elias, the Assisan friar, formed a friendship which lasted during the remainder of their lives, linking them together in a common fate. Whether Elias was won over from the first by the charm of so fascinating a personality, or simply baffled by a mind more subtle than his own, it is difficult to say, as the chroniclers have drawn too thick a veil over this unfortunate meeting for anyone to judge with fairness. His failure certainly gave a good opportunity to his many enemies to commence a very satisfactory scheme of blackening his character with the Pope; and the rumour flew to Rome that he was a traitor to his church. Branded with the abhorred name of Ghibelline there was now little hope for Elias, whose friendship with the arch-enemy of Holy Church grew always stronger. The Lombards becoming uneasy, accused Gregory of favouring the Emperor, while the latter bitterly complained that the Pope listened too much to the cause of the Lombards, and thought too little of the imperial dignity. At last a Chapter was called to enquire into the conduct of the Vicar-General, and as he was not present, his misdeeds lost nothing by the telling. Although Elias was deposed, and his place filled by a Pisan, he still held the title of

Guardian and Master of the Assisan Basilica, but in a city of such strong Guelph sympathies as Assisi, it was unlikely he would be left in peace, especially as the Pope no longer favoured him. Life soon became impossible there, and of his own free will he retired to a hermitage in the woods of Cortona, followed by some dozen faithful friars, "not excepting," adds a spiteful chronicler, "Fra Bartolemeo da Padova, his most excellent cook." Thence he wrote to the Pope explaining his conduct, and humbly entreating to be pardoned, but the letter was found years afterwards in the pocket of the Pisan Vicar-General, who had promised to deliver it safely at Rome. Whether the letter was wilfully laid aside or only forgotten, none have been able to decide, but the incident had disastrous effects upon Elias. He waited anxiously for the pardon which never came, until embittered by finding himself deserted by nearly everyone, he openly joined the party of Frederic II. He went a step further, and abused Pope Gregory in caustic language, taunting him with injustice and avarice, and with being a simonist, which of course ended in his excommunication "to the great scandal of the Church." The news of his disgrace spread quickly through Italy, and the children sang a couplet, invented on the spur of the moment, under the windows of franciscan convents:

> "Or'e attorno Frat'Elia
> Che pres'ha la mala via."

It was the cry which met the friars in every street they passed, so that the name of their former Vicar-General became hateful to them. And yet even now Elias must have had some friends in the Order, as at a council held at Genoa in 1244 there were a few who wished to reinstate him. The Pope commanded him to appear, but as the papal brief never arrived he was

thus again debarred from clearing his much damaged character. The consequence of these efforts in his behalf only ended in his falling still deeper into disgrace; and for the second time he was excommunicated. We next hear of him roaming about the country with Frederic II, who found him useful on more than one occasion as a diplomatic agent. Elias was sent with strong letters of recommendation from Pier delle Vigne to Baldwin II, Emperor of Constantinople, and to Hugo I, King of Cyprus, and he was even charged to arrange a marriage for a daughter of Frederic. Among his various talents Elias seems to have been able to accommodate himself to a military life. We hear of him, both at the siege of Faenza and of Ravenna, riding out to battle on a magnificent charger. At other times he found a peaceful asylum at the Emperor's court, presenting a strange contrast to the "strolling minstrels, troubadours, poets, warriors, jugglers and artists of every grade" who frequented it. Upon the Emperor's death Elias returned to Cortona where the citizens received him kindly as he had obtained privileges for them at various times from his patron. Here, at the small hermitage in the ilex wood, he passed the last few years of his life in building a Franciscan church and convent, aided by the citizens who gave the ground for the site.

While the last touch was being put to the building of the great Assisan Basilica and it was about to be consecrated by Innocent IV, in 1253, Elias lay dying in his little cell at Cortona. His loneliness touched the heart of a lay brother, who with gentle words expressed his sorrow at seeing him an outcast from the Order and offered him help. Elias, no longer the proud ambitious churchman, answered very gently: "My brother, I see no other way save that thou

shouldst go to the Pope and beg him for the love of God and of St. Francis His servant, through whose teaching I quitted the world, to absolve me from his excommunication and to give me back again the habit of religion." The lay brother hastened to Rome and pleaded so humbly that Innocent "permitted him to go back, and if he found Brother Elias alive he was to absolve him in his name from the excommunication and restore unto him the habit; so full of joy the friar departed and returned in hot haste to Brother Elias, and finding him yet alive but nigh unto death he absolved him from the excommunication and put on him again the habit, and Brother Elias quitted this life and his soul was saved by the merits of St. Francis and by his prayers in which Brother Elias had reposed such great faith."

Some say that even at the last fate pursued Elias, for the city of Cortona being at that time under an interdict no blessed oil could be found for the sacrament of extreme unction. Certainly his body was not allowed to rest in the church he had built for the brethren. A zealous friar dug it up and flung it on a dunghill, saying that no Ghibelline should be permitted to lie in consecrated ground.

Thus it was that Elias left a name hated among the franciscans as bitterly as the Emperor Frederic's always has been by Guelph historians. But while the war against the latter still rages as fiercely as ever, Elias, save for the gratitude felt by the citizens of Assisi, rests almost forgotten and his story hidden in the pages of old chronicles. Few even remember that owing to the untiring energy of this man Assisi owns one of the most beautiful monuments of mediæval art. It is possible that had Fra Leo, Bernard of Quintavalle and his companions succeeded in those first days of struggle, the Basilica of San Francesco might never

have attained its present magnificence or the art of Giotto been born in this Umbrian corner of Italy. Chi lo sa? It is a question one hardly even likes to think of. But the danger passed away, and who cares now whether the franciscans grumbled at the time, or said the church and convent with its buttresses and towers looked more like the feudal fortress of some mighty baron than the tomb of the Preacher of Poverty? The San Francesco we love rises golden and rose-tinted above the olive groves and the vineyards, above the plain with its young corn and the white villages lying among the fruit-trees, above a rushing torrent which circles round the base of the Subasian mountain on its way to the Tiber; and all day the varied group of church, arcaded convent and terraced gardens, is showing its beauty to the sun.

In every light it is beautiful, in every mood we recall it, together with the choicest things we have seen in travel, haunting us like the charm of a living person. When the winter mists at early morning wrap round it like a mantle, or the stars form crowns above its roof and bell tower, there is always some new loveliness which thrills us, some fresh note of colour we have not noticed there before, making us again and again feel grateful that Elias forgot or ignored the teaching of his master.

SAN FRANCESCO FROM THE PLAIN

CHAPTER V

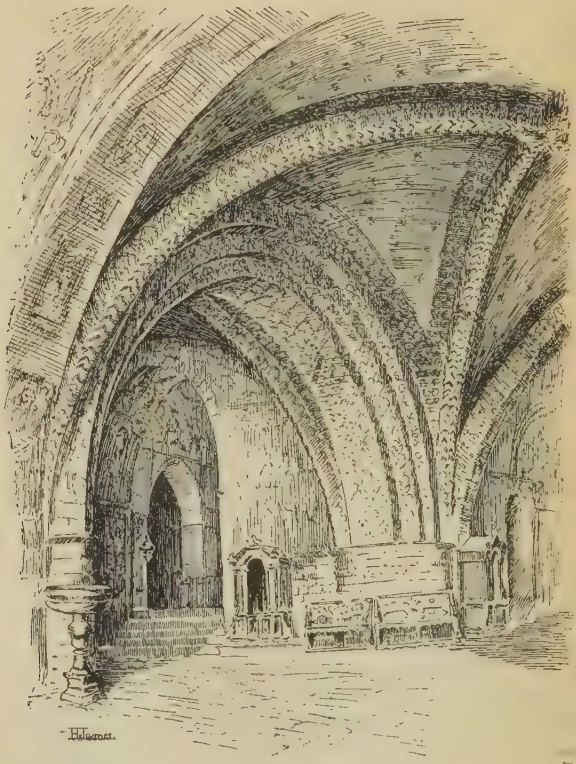
Cimabue and his School at San Francesco

"Il semble au premier coup d'œil que le rève de François d'Assise a dû amener la fin de tout l'art et de toute noble vie. Chose étrange! ce sordide mendiant fut le père de l'art italien."—E. RENAN. *Nouvelles Études d'Histoire Religieuse.*

THE LOWER CHURCH

SO rarely in Italy is a church perfect both within and without that it is with amazement we find at Assisi not one but two churches, choir and nave piled above each other, and covered from roof to floor with frescoes, as perfect of their kind as the buildings which they decorate. Wars in every town, trouble, dissension and jealousies among men, raged like a storm over the land, but all this turmoil of a fevered age was unable to check the steady, rapid progress of at least this monument to a dead saint's memory; and we perceive yet another proof of the extraordinary influence of St. Francis, who was able by the devotion and admiration he excited, to inspire all with some of his own love of the beautiful, which has lasted in Italy, from the days of his ministry, through centuries of both faith and unbelief down to modern times. But from this arose a strange event; this lover of solitude, who during his life sought only for humiliation and obscurity and loved best the poor and deserted way-side sanctuaries, was laid to rest in one of the most beautiful Italian churches of that time.

While wandering through the Lower Church, marvelling at the delicate friezes of tiny heads, flowers and



THE LOWER CHURCH

winged horses, which frame every fresco; at the great spreading arches—built for strength; the vaulted roof

of deep azure blue with dull golden stars upon its surface, looming above the paintings and dimming their brilliancy by the shadows which lurk in its depth, we feel that within the shelter of its perpetual twilight this is a place to pray in. It is truly the home of St. Francis, and notwithstanding its richness and vast splendour his spirit is here, the certainty that he once had dwelt upon the earth is felt.

Few ever stop to look at the walls of the nave, and indeed, upon coming out of the sunlight, the darkness and gloom for some minutes is oppressive and but little can be distinguished in the gloom. It was almost by chance that we one day noticed some frescoes, ruined and faded, just outside the Chapel of St. Martin. They are of no beauty as works of art, indeed they are rather ugly, but their interest lies in showing us that from the very beginning artists had endeavoured, however feebly, to depict the legend of St. Francis.[1] On the left wall of the nave, outside the Chapel of St. Martin, is a fresco representing the Sermon to the Birds with the same idea of composition which was adopted later by Giotto; the saint slightly bends towards the birds upon the ground, his companion stands behind, while the single tree adds a certain solemnity to the scene. The figures are large and ungainly, with feet terrible to behold, the lines are hard, and there is little feeling of movement or life; yet we look at it with reverence and hope, for we know that, with all the ugliness and stiffness of workmanship, the artist was vehemently striving in

[1] It is difficult to say how free a hand the artists were allowed when called in to execute work for any church, but probably, in the case of San Francesco, they were obliged to illustrate precisely the scenes and events chosen by the friars, who in the case of the saint's legend would be very severe judges, requiring quite the best that the artist could produce.

this dark church to shake off the hampering chains of worn-out traditions, and find for himself something nearer to the truth. And as we look at this one and at the next, representing St. Francis receiving the Stigmata, our thoughts are carried to other renderings of these scenes, and we say with light hearts: "After this poor craftsman comes Giotto, King of Tuscan painters."

These are the only two frescoes illustrating the life of the saint, though there may have been others which were destroyed when the walls of the nave were broken down in order to form entrances to the chapels, added to the main building about 1300. But on the right side, beginning outside the Chapel of San Stefano, are parts of several scenes from the New Testament; a crowd of women and men standing round the cross, a group of women, the Descent from the Cross, a Pietà, a landscape with houses and a decoration of circular ornaments outside the Capella di Sta. Maria Maddalena, generally attributed to Giunta Pisano, thus giving them too early a date.[1]

[1] Later documents of the convent speak of a crucifix painted in 1236 by Giunta Pisano with a portrait of Brother Elias "taken from life" and the following inscription:

Frater Elias fieri fecit
Jesu Christe pie
Misere pecantis Helie
Giunta Pisanus me pinxit. A.D.M. CCXXXVI.

It hung from a beam in the Upper Church until 1624 when it suddenly disappeared, and it seems to have inspired Padre Angeli (author of the "Collis Paradisis") with the theory that Giunta Pisano was the first to paint in San Francesco, ascribing to him, as some have continued to do, the frescoes in the choir and transept of the Upper Church. Messrs Crowe and Cavacaselle say, on what authority it is impossible to discover, that the middle aisle of the Lower Church "seems to have been painted between 1225 and 1250," ignoring the fact that Pope Gregory only laid the foundation stone of the Basilica in 1228. Without trying to find such early dates for the history of art at Assisi, it

To us their interest seems rather to lie in that they plainly show how the earliest masters, whilst endeavouring to illustrate the franciscan legend, failed so completely to satisfy their employers that they were bidden to stay their hand and continue to paint the well-worn theme of the history of the world's redemption, which required less invention than the legend of St. Francis, where a new out-look on life had to be acquired. So the franciscans, failing to find a painter who could illustrate their founder's life to their satisfaction, contented themselves with other things, perhaps hoping that in course of time one might arise who could do justice to the theme. Well it was that they waited.

Shortly after these frescoes had been completed in the Lower Church, art received a new impulse (one likes to think that the struggles of the first artist towards something better and more true to life had to do with this); others came, with Giotto at their head, and painted over some of these early efforts, leaving us only Cimabue's great Madonna, a few ruined frescoes, a Byzantine pattern, and stray touches of colour in dark corners of the church to remind us of these first decorators of San Francesco.

We get a melancholy picture from Vasari of the depths to which art had sunk, and of the degenerate artists still following a worn-out tradition until it became as a dead thing in their hands deprived of all inspiration, when "in the year 1240, by the will of God, Giovanni Cimabue . . . was born in the city of Florence to give the first light to the art of painting."

appears to us quite wonderful enough that some fifty or sixty years after the ceremony of the consecration in 1253, Cimabue and his contemporaries—Giotto and his Tuscan followers—had completed their work in both churches.

Cimabue is rightly called the Father of Italian art, as he represented a new era among Italian masters who were awakening to their country's needs; when men, filled with strange restless energy, grew tired of the Byzantine Madonna with her court of stiff, lifeless saints, and looked for something in closer touch with their mood and aspirations.

Round the name of Cimabue are grouped many charming legends belonging to a time when the people, anxious to possess the new thing their hearts craved for, looked eagerly and critically at an artist's work. There is the story of how when he had finished the picture of the Virgin Mary, the Florentines came to his workshop, and, expecting much from him, yet were amazed at the wonderful beauty of the grand Madonna, and carried the picture with rejoicing, to the sound of music, to the Church of Sta. Maria Novella, where it still hangs in the dark chapel of the Ruccellai; a street in Florence down which the picture passed being called Borgo Allegri, because of the gladness of that day. It is only a legend, and one that has been oft repeated, and as often doubted. Now the existence of Cimabue is even questioned by some, but whoever invented the story understood the great change which had come among the people and into art. It was only right that in the church of the saint who personified the feeling of the age, caught its spirit, and sent the impulse of the people even further, should centre all the first efforts towards this awakening and revival, until, step by step, the masterpieces of Giotto were reached. When we remember this, the large fresco of Cimabue in the right transept of the Lower Church becomes more full of beauty and meaning.[1] The

[1] *Right* transept is always synonymous with *South* transept, but in this case, as San Francesco is built with the altar facing to the west because it was necessary to have the entrance away

great spirit of her presence fills the church, her majesty and nobility is that of the ideal Madonna, grave to sadness, thinking, as her eyes look steadily out upon the world, what future years would bring to the Child seated on her lap, who stretches out a baby hand to clasp her veil. All the angels round the throne sway towards her; in their heavy plaits of hair shines a dull red light, and in their wings and on the Madonna's gown are mauve and russet shades like the colours of autumnal oaks. . . . "To this day," says Mr Ruskin, "among all the Mater Dolorosa's of Christianity, Cimabue's at Assisi is the noblest; nor did any painter after him add one link to the chain of thought with which he summed the creation of the earth, and preached its redemption."

St. Francis has not been forgotten in this fresco, but Cimabue having given all his art to make the Virgin and her choir of angels beautiful, his figure is not quite one's idea of the ethereal Umbrian preacher, and his being there at all spoils the symmetry of the grouping. It is not improbable that the figure of St. Clare stood on the other side, and was erased when the Chapel of Sta. Maria Maddalena was built, and the ornamental border painted round this fresco, which cut off part of the wings of the two angels on the left of the Virgin.

Vasari vaguely tells us of some frescoes from the lives of Jesus Christ and of St. Francis, painted by Cimabue in the Lower Church, and later writers have thought these must have been destroyed to make

from the precipitous side of the hill, the *Right* transept looks to the *North*, the *Left* to the *South*, and we have thought it easier to keep to the actual position of the church in describing the different frescoes. Herr Thode in his book has done this, but it may be well to observe that Messrs Crowe and Cavacaselle refer to the transepts and chapels as if they faced the parts of the compass in the usual way.

room for Giotto's work. If paintings were there at all they were more likely to have been the work of inferior artists, for it seems improbable that Giotto, coming to Assisi for the first time when he was quite a youth, should destroy any work of his master, who was still alive, in order to substitute his own early efforts.

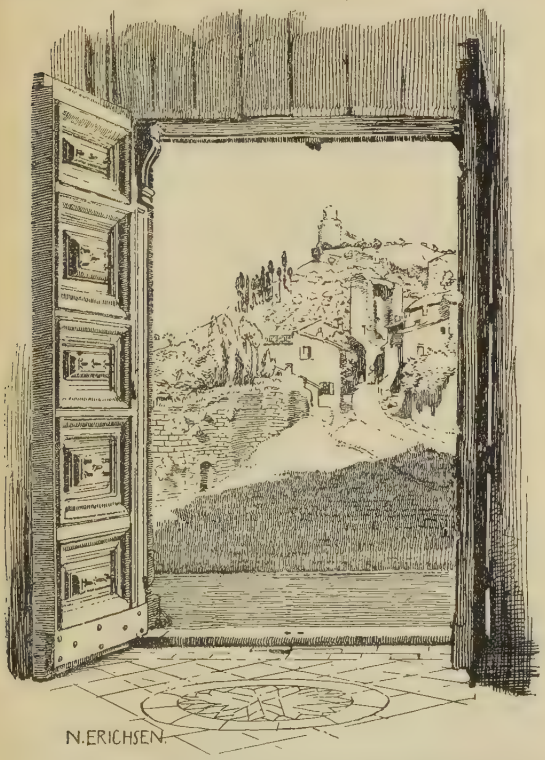
The Upper Church

Not only was the Upper Church essentially fitted for fresco painting, but it required an elaborate scheme of decoration, just as a setting, however perfect, needs a gem to complete it; and it almost seems as though "Jacopo" had stayed his hand, with the intention that here, at least, architecture should be subservient to wall decoration, and had foreseen the need of large spaces to be covered with paintings, as brightly coloured, as clear, and as closely set together as are the colours upon a butterfly's wings.

"It was here, in the Upper Church of Assisi," says Mr Roger Fry, "that the Italian genius first attained to self-expression in the language of monumental painting, a language which no other European nation, except the Greeks, has ever mastered." But the question as to who were the predecessors of Giotto, and when exactly they came, can never, we think, be answered; for the time is not far off when these splendid ruins of early art will have totally faded away, or, what is infinitely worse, be covered with still thicker layers of paint than the "restorer" has already laid upon them.

Vasari finds no difficulty about the matter, declaring, to his own satisfaction and for the instruction of future generations, that every fresco in the apse and transepts, together with the series relating to the history of the Jews and the life of Christ, are by Cimabue. But then Cimabue was a Tuscan, and Vasari, the painter of

Tuscan Arezzo, was determined to give as much glory to his fatherland as he could. We too would



LOOKING THROUGH THE DOORS OF THE UPPER CHURCH TOWARDS THE PORTA S. GIACOMO AND THE CASTLE

give all possible honour to Cimabue, but are bound to follow the opinion of later critics, who less prejudiced

and hasty in their criticisms than Vasari, see the work of many hands in all these frescoes; so we have gathered together a few notes concerning them from various authorities to help the traveller to form his own ideas upon the subject. The theme is too endless to attempt in a small space to give more than a very brief summary of the chief facts.

Frescoes of the Choir and Transepts.—These may be divided into two distinct classes, those of the north transept, which are older and inferior to those of the south transept and choir. Herr Thode attributes their difference to the fact that while all are the work of Cimabue, the frescoes in the north transept were painted when he was quite young, while the rest belong to a later period, when he had attained his full powers. The Crucifixion of the north transept, one of the most ruined, reminds us somewhat of works by Margaritone which may be studied, without much pleasure, in most Italian galleries. The figures standing round the Cross are short, with small heads and large hands, and not even in the fainting Madonna is there the slightest charm. In the Martyrdom of St. Peter, on the next wall, it is curious to note the similarity of treatment to Giotto's fresco at Rome of the same subject. The Saint, head downwards upon the Cross without any group of people would have made but a dull composition; so both artists added an obelisk on either side to relieve the monotony of line.

Then follows the scene of Simon Magus being borne upwards by demons with bat-like wings; and upon the next wall, beneath the triforium, is represented the death of Ananias and Sapphira, and St. Peter curing the lame before the Temple, where the figures are certainly more majestic and, according to Herr Thode, distinctly show the hand of Cimabue.

Behind the papal throne are medallions of the friend

and patron of St. Francis, Gregory IX, and of Innocent IV, who consecrated the Basilica. The frescoes represent the life of the Virgin, but they are all too faded to be enjoyed, save that of the Coronation on the right wall, just above the choir stalls; the Virgin is seated upon a wooden throne with Christ by her side and a group of apostles and spectators beneath. There is a striking resemblance in the drawing and form of the standing figures to those in the Crucifixion of the south transept. This, though very ruined and blackened in parts, showing no other trace of colour than a faint film of golden yellow, has still the power to make us feel that once, long ago, it was a fine work, worthy of a great master. Weeping angels fly above the Cross, some with outstretched hands, while others veil their eyes from the sight of the suffering Saviour; the Magdalen, her arms thrown up above her head, is seen in strong relief against the sky, and contrasting with this dramatic gesture, is the figure of the Virgin, erect and still, her hand clasped in that of St. John. The whole conception is dignified, replete with dramatic feeling of the nobler kind, and has been thought worthy, by Herr Thode, to be put down as the finest of Cimabue's creations.

The remaining frescoes deal with scenes from the Apocalypse, but they are so ruined that it is a thankless task for any, except the student, to try and distinguish each separately. Indeed after a minute examination of so many ruined works of art, a certain sadness and weariness is felt, but if the pilgrim has time to rest awhile in a quiet corner of the stalls and look at choir and transepts solely for their colour, he will gain for himself many beautiful memories not easily forgotten. It is a vision of youthful saints, of men with lances hurrying down a rocky mountain side, of angels trumpeting to the four ends of the earth, and out of this medley

of shadowy forms in fading frescoes, like sunlight breaking through a mist with golden light, loom the mighty angels of Cimabue. Their heads are crowned by a heavy mass of auburn hair, their wings slightly lifted, as though they were on earth but for a short space, and they seem as remote from mortals as the Sphynx herself in their dignity and calm repose. To Cimabue belongs the conception of such grave and strangely beautiful creations, winged messengers of strength, who come midway between the stiff Byzantine figures, and the swift-moving angels of Giotto and the cherub children forms of later Umbrian and Venetian schools.

The Nave.—All writers upon the subject agree that here the frescoes show no trace of Cimabue's style, but are from the hand of his contemporaries and pupils, who worked together in unfolding the history of the Jews and the world's redemption. If it is impossible to hint even at the names of these artists, the most hurried traveller must notice the different character which marks the legend of the New Testament from that of the Old, where the work of talented copyists of classical works of art differ from that of others who kept nearer to the style of Cimabue, instilling into it more or less life, as their individual powers permitted. Herein lies much of the history of early Italian art, but the few remaining frescoes, especially on the left wall, have been so terribly over-painted that the work of the critic is rendered well-nigh hopeless.

Beginning at the right wall by the High Altar we have probably the work of a fine Byzantine master, or at least of one who must have copied a Greek masterpiece. In the Creation of the World, God, represented as a young man seated on a globe of fire, is, with a gesture of his hand, casting upon

the earth his last creation—man—who, still suffused with celestial colour, is borne across the sea towards the land. A ram, a bull and a lion besport themselves upon the shore, enormous birds sit on the bushes, and the sea is already full of every kind of fish; slender pink clouds are in the sky, and the distant hills on the horizon have faded into shades of blue-green, like the landscape of an Umbrian picture.

The nude figures of Adam and Eve in the Expulsion from Paradise are wonderfully good for the time, and the manner in which the angels are kicking them out of the garden of Eden is somewhat unusual.

Beginning again at the first bay window but on the lower row of frescoes, in the Building of the Ark Noah is seated, an obelisk-shaped rock rising behind him, and gives his directions with a majestic air to his sons as to the sawing and placing of the great beams. A man, standing by his side, completes the composition, which has much dignity and finish.

The fresco of the Sacrifice of Isaac, with Abraham raising his sword above him his body slightly thrown back, is perhaps one of the most striking of the series. The wind has caught his yellow robe, which unfurls itself against a landscape of sandy hills.

All that remains of the next are three angels, whose grandeur can only be compared to those of Cimabue in the south transept. The remaining subjects on this side are by a different master, who followed closely the best classical traditions, and succeeds in giving extraordinary repose to his compositions as well as meaning to the various figures.

In Jacob before Isaac, Isaac is waiting for his dish of venison, and Jacob's attitude denotes uncertainty as to

the reception he is likely to receive, while his mother, lifting the curtain of her husband's bed, seems to encourage her son.

The next fresco is similar in composition, but better preserved. Here we feel the blindness of Isaac, the perplexity of Esau, who cannot understand why his father refuses to bless him, and the fear of Rebecca, who has stepped back, knowing that her fraud must now be discovered. In this composition the artist has strictly kept to rules laid down by his predecessors, and the result, if a little stiff and wanting in originality, is yet pleasing and restful to look at, presenting a great contrast to the somewhat exaggerated movements expressed in the preceding ones.

The last of the series is the steward finding the cup in Benjamin's sack, though greatly ruined it still shows much beauty of composition.

Upon the opposite wall, by the altar, is depicted the life of Christ by followers of Cimabue, but the few frescoes that remain are so mutilated and repainted, that it is impossible to say much about them, or even to imagine what they may once have been.

"In the Capture," writes Messrs Crowe and Cavacaselle, "the Saviour is of a superior size to the rest of those around him, and of a stern but serene bearing. Trivial conception marks the scene of the Saviour carrying the Cross."

The Pietà, one of the last, is evidently by a finer scholar of Cimabue, and the woman coming round the rocks resembles slightly the figure of Rebecca in the two frescoes on the opposite side. "The composition," write the same authors, "is more like that which Giotto afterwards conceived than any other before or since"; but the colossal figure of Christ destroys the harmony of the scene.

The arch at the end of the nave is painted to repre-

sent a series of niches, in each of which stands the figure of a saint, all are much repainted, as are the medallions of St. Peter and St. Paul by the door. The Descent of the Holy Spirit is greatly ruined, and in the Ascension the *intonaco* has peeled off, showing the bricks, so that the apostles have the appearance of looking over a wall.

The ceiling is frescoed in three different places by other masters, whose names have not come down to us. Between the transepts and nave the four Evangelists, seated outside the gates of towns, are so utterly ruined and blackened by time and damp that it is barely worth craning one's neck to look at them.[1] But the four medallions of Christ, the Madonna, St. John the Baptist and St. Francis, which ornament the centre of the nave, are among the most beautiful things in the church, and quite perfect as decoration. At each corner of the spandrels stands an angel upon a globe, with wings uplifted, delicate in outline and brilliantly coloured, while the whole is bordered by the most exquisite design of blossoms and green foliage rising out of slender vases, which mingle with cupids, angels, winged horses and rabbits on a dull red ground. It must have been painted by one who had learned his art from the same source whence the decorative painters of Pompeii drew their inspiration.

It is not an easy thing to fit entire figures seated on large marble thrones into triangular spaces, and so the artist found, who in the groined ceiling nearest the door had to paint the Doctors of the Church, Sts. Jerome, Gregory, Ambrose and Augustin,

[1] To facilitate seeing the paintings of the ceiling, both here and in the Lower Church, it would be well to use a hand-glass, a simple and most effectual addition to the comfort of the traveller.

dictating their epistles to busy clerks. But there is much that is charming in them, though as decoration they partly fail, and a resemblance may be found to the frescoes of Isaac and his sons, which seem to have influenced Giotto in his paintings of old men.

Vasari's enthusiasm was roused when he looked upon these endless paintings, and he tells us that: "This work, truly grand and rich, and admirably well executed, must, I conceive, in those times have astonished the world, the more so that painting had for so long been sunk in such obscurity: and to me, who saw it once more in 1563, it appeared most beautiful, as I thought how Cimabue, in such darkness could have discovered so much light."

. . . . . .

It would be well, before leaving, to look at the windows of the Upper Church, which are among the oldest in Italy, and, according to Herr Burckhardt, the most beautiful. As of most things connected with San Francesco, little is known about them; Vasari says they were designed by the painters of the frescoes; an opinion partly held by Herr Thode, who sees a great resemblance to the style of Cimabue in the right-hand window of the choir (the centre one is modern) with scenes from the lives of Abraham, David and Christ, of most beautiful colour and design. The left window, belonging to the same period, contains naïve scenes from the Old Testament, amongst which (the sixth from the top of the left half) is Jonah emerging from a blue-green whale the colour of the waves, and possessed of large white eyes.

Those of the transepts of the same date are even finer and more beautifully coloured. Medallions of geometrical patterns of exquisite design and hue ornament the left-hand window of the north transept,

while that on the right contains scenes from the Old Testament and the life of Christ; in both of these, according to Herr Thode, the influence of Cimabue is apparent.

The left window of the south transept contains seven scenes from the Creation and seven from the lives of Adam and Eve, who (in the last two divisions of the right half) are being driven out of Eden, and, spade in hand, are working at the foot of a tree. The eight saints of the right window, seated majestically on gothic thrones ornamented with spires, and dressed in rose-coloured, red and green garments, have certainly the appearance of being, as Herr Thode suggests, of a style even anterior to Cimabue.

Half of the bay window on the left, looking towards the altar, is the work of the Umbrian school of the time of Fiorenzo di Lorenzo (there is a Madonna in a blue mantle, and St. Onofrio clothed in vine-leaves), while the left half, with medallions composed of very small pieces of glass representing scenes from the early life of Christ, are perhaps the most beautiful, and certainly the oldest, in the church, and can even be compared to the stained glass of French cathedrals. The third window (the second has suffered considerably, and what is left of the original belongs to the fifteenth century) has been a good deal restored, but the large angels with blue and purple wings standing in an arch, behind which a little town is seen, are very fine, and below them is a curious small figure of St. Francis floating in front of a colossal Christ, belonging also to the fifteenth century.

Very beautiful are the two saints beneath gothic arches in the last window, and the priests in their rose-coloured stoles, the bishops in crimson and gold, and the other figures of warriors and saints.

The right half of the bay window near the door

upon the opposite side, belonging also to the Umbrian school, contains some charming scenes from the life of St. Anthony, while on the left are incidents of the life of St. Francis. The whole is remarkable for delicate rose colours, greens and pale blues, and a total absence of the strong deep tones of the older and finer windows; but they are very beautiful of their kind, like patches of pale sunshine in the church.

The next two windows betray a more ancient style in the fine figures of the apostles (their heads, alas, are modern), and in the scenes from their lives, which are of a deeper tone than the former one; but even more beautiful is the last window, which does not seem to have been restored within the last three centuries, and where the colours standing out from a creamy background are very lovely. The two large and grand figures of two apostles are believed by Herr Thode to be from drawings by Cimabue.

Both Francesco di Terranuova and Valentino da Udine were employed to repair all the windows about 1476, large sums being expended, principally by the Popes who never ceased to patronise the franciscan Basilica. A most comical appearance is given by the distressing additions made in our own time of modern heads upon bodies of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Until very lately an exquisite rose window was to be seen over the eastern door, now replaced by white glass; one would like to know how it so mysteriously disappeared and where it now is.

No pains had been spared to make San Francesco as lovely in every detail as the brain of man could devise, and it is most remarkable how the frescoes belong to the general idea of the building as though every artist had thought as much of this unity as of the individual perfection of his work. The beautiful papal throne in the choir, of white marble encrusted in

mosaic with its frieze of strange animals in low relief, its arms supported by red marble lions, is almost a replica of the Soldan's throne in Giotto's fresco, and was designed by Fuccio Fiorentino in 1347, when the architecture that Giotto delighted in was still the reconised style in Italy.[1] The marble and mosaic altar is of the same date, and the octagonal pulpit of sculptured stone, with saints in small tabernacles, spiral columns and designs of leaves slightly tinted, supposed also to be by Fuccio, is placed at the corner of the wall of the nave looking as if it had grown there. The columns supporting the arched gallery round the church have each been painted to represent mauve and rose-coloured marbles, and there is not a single space in all the building which has not been decorated to harmonise with the frescoes, giving a perfect sense of infinite completeness and beauty, to which time has added by mellowing everything into a pale orange colour—the colour of Assisi.

[1] Mr Ruskin says that the gable of the bishop's throne is "of the exact period when the mosaic workers of the thirteenth century at Rome adopted rudely the masonry of the north. Briefly this is a Greek temple pediment, in which, doubtful of their power to carve figures beautiful enough, they cut a trefoiled hold for ornament, and bordered the edge with a harlequinade of mosaic. They then call to their aid the Greek sea waves, and let the surf of the Ægean climb along the slopes, and toss itself at the top into a fleur-de-lys."

CHAPTER VI

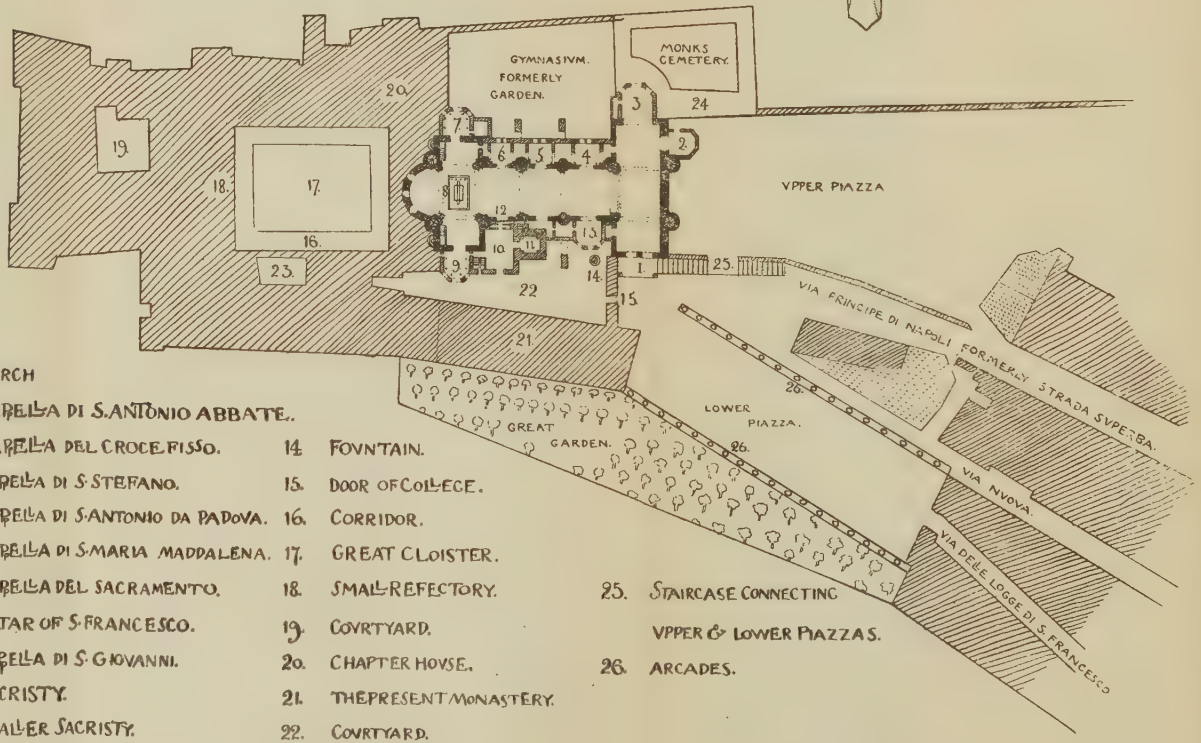
The Paintings of Giotto and his School in the Lower Church

> " . . . Cimabue thought
> To lord it over painting's field; and now
> The cry is Giotto's, and his name eclipsed."
> DANTE, *Purgatory*, xi., Cary's translation.

THE work of Cimabue, grand and noble as it is, yet gives the impression of belonging to remote times, between which and that of Giotto, his pupil, a great gulf is set. In both churches at Assisi we pass from the early efforts of an awakening age to the work of one, who, if not the first to see the light, was the first to discover the true principles of art, to give it life, and to found a school whence a long series of painters came to carry on for generations the lessons he had taught. Cimabue did wonders for the century in which he lived; of Giotto, even granting that his drawing was sometimes faulty, and the types of faces he painted were not always beautiful, it would be an insult to express such condescending praise; and even a hasty study of his frescoes in San Francesco must soon explain the everlasting sway he holds, now, as in those first years when his work seemed little short of miraculous to the wondering Florentines.

Some fourteen miles to the north of Florence, among the hills of the Mugello, lies the scattered hamlet of Vespignano where Giotto Bondone was born of a poor

PLAN. OF. THE. LOWER. CHVRCH. AND. MONASTERY. OF. SAN. FRANCESCO. AT. ASSISI.



1. PORCH
2. CAPELLA DI S. ANTONIO ABBATE.
3. CAPELLA DEL CROCE FISSO.
4. CAPELLA DI S. STEFANO.
5. CAPELLA DI S. ANTONIO DA PADOVA.
6. CAPELLA DI S. MARIA MADDALENA.
7. CAPELLA DEL SACRAMENTO.
8. ALTAR OF S. FRANCESCO.
9. CAPELLA DI S. GIOVANNI.
10. SACRISTY.
11. SMALLER SACRISTY.
12. PAPAL THRONE.
13. CAPELLA DI S. MARTINO.
14. FOVNTAIN.
15. DOOR OF COLLEGE.
16. CORRIDOR.
17. GREAT CLOISTER.
18. SMALL REFECTORY.
19. COVRTYARD.
20. CHAPTER HOVSE.
21. THE PRESENT MONASTERY.
22. COVRTYARD.
23. SMALL COVRTYARD.
24. CLOISTERS.
25. STAIRCASE CONNECTING VPPER & LOWER PIAZZAS.
26. ARCADES.

peasant family in the year 1265. Even at an early age, Vasari says, the boy was remarkable for the vivacity and quick intelligence which endeared him not only to his parents, but to all who knew him in the village and country round. He passed his childhood among them, knowing nothing of the city just across the hills, but learning much, during the long days while he wandered forth to tend his father's sheep, which was helpful to him in after years to preserve his straightforward outlook upon life and the strength and freshness of a nature that loved the sunburnt valleys and the freedom of the shepherd's existence.

When Giotto was ten years old it happened that Cimabue, on his way from Florence to Vespignano upon a matter of business, found him seated by the roadside, his flock gathered near, busily employed in drawing the outline of a sheep from life upon a smooth piece of rock. Struck by the boy's industry in the pursuit of art and his evident cleverness, Cimabue hastened to obtain the father's consent to adopt and make an artist of him. Leaving the old life in the peasant's cottage for ever, Giotto now turned south along new roads, and with Cimabue by his side, saw for the first time the city of Florence, beautiful as she lay upon the banks of the Arno in a setting of wooded hills.

The progress he made under Cimabue's guidance, who taught him all he knew, was marvellous indeed. At ten years of age a shepherd tracing idle fancies on the stones, then for a few years an apprentice in a Florentine workshop grinding colours with the others for his master's big Madonnas; while ten years later he had already gained the title of Master and was a famous painter, courted by popes and kings, and leaving masterpieces upon the walls of churches

throughout Italy, that people of all times and countries have come and paused awhile to see.

Let us suppose it was the air of Florence, which, according to Vasari, "generates a desire for glory and honour and gives a natural quickness to the perceptions of men," that made Giotto a perfect Florentine, alert, witty, and ever ready with a caustic repartee to anyone who bandied words with him. But though other influences were at work around him, and new images crowded upon his active brain, he kept undimmed the vision of his mountain valley, of the fields, of the days spent in his native village, and, with the eyes of a shepherd he continued to look on all the incidents of human life; he saw the grandeur, the tragedy, the weaknesses, aye, and the humour too, in everything that surrounded him, setting it all down in his frescoes in his own simple and original way. In a few words Mr Ruskin has touched upon the keynotes of Giotto's character when he says: . . . "his mind was one of the most healthy, kind and active that ever informed a human frame. His love of beauty was entirely free from weakness; his love of truth untinged by severity; his industry constant without impatience; his workmanship accurate without formalism; his temper serene and yet playful; his imagination exhaustive without extravagance; and his faith firm without superstition. I do not know, in the annals of art, such another example of happy, practical, unerring, and benevolent power."

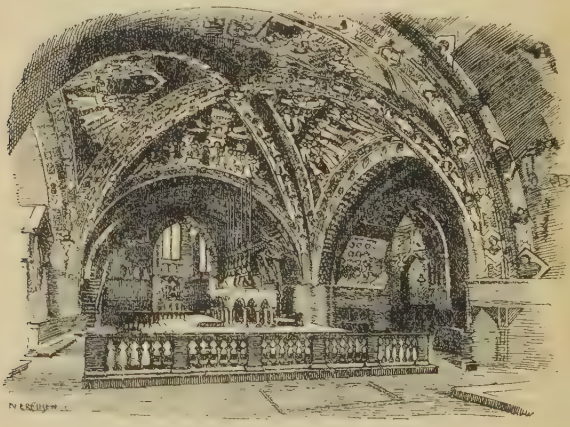
Such was the man who came to Assisi to take up the work left uncompleted by Cimabue and his contemporaries. Giotto was then almost unknown, not having executed any of those great works upon which his fame now rests, and it is not unlikely that the recommendation by Cimabue of his pro-

mising pupil to the friars of San Francesco led to his being called there when barely twenty years of age.[1] Opinions differ as to which were his first works and whether he began in the Lower or in the Upper Church, and as there are absolutely no documents relating to the subject, and Vasari is of no help in the matter of dates or precise details, the only way to come to any conclusion is to group these frescoes according to their style. We do not wish to force any arbitrary opinions on this matter, and have simply placed Giotto's work in the order that it seems to us more likely to have been executed. Those who disagree have only to transpose the chapters as they think fit. The chief thing is to enjoy the frescoes and speculate as little as possible on all the contradictory volumes written about them.

Right Transept.—According to Messrs. Crowe and Cavalcaselle these frescoes are by Giotto, and Mr Bernhard Berenson is of the opinion that they belong to his early period, and were executed by him before the franciscans knew what his powers were, and whether they could entrust to him the more difficult task of illustrating the legend of St. Francis. The subjects are taken from the early life of Christ which had been depicted many

[1] There are only the most meagre scraps of information to rely upon as to the dates of Giotto's works at San Francesco, and it is needless here to enter into the endless discussion. One thing is obvious; the Assisan frescoes must have been executed before those at Padua which have always been assigned to 1306. In these pages we have sometimes followed the view held by Messrs. Crowe and Cavalcaselle, sometimes that of Herr Thode, who appears to have studied the question with open eyes, but our final authority is M. Bernhard Berenson, who in a visit paid lately to Assisi was kind enough to point out many things which we should otherwise have passed by, and in the sequence of the frescoes by Giotto at San Francesco we have entirely followed his opinion.

times in preceding centuries, but although Giotto attempted no very elaborate or original manner of treatment, his style was rapidly developing, and we have in some of the scenes little traits of nature which only belong to him. On the outside of the Chapel del Sacramento, over the arch, he painted the Annunciation with such charm, dignity and harmony of outline that it would be difficult to find a more



CHOIR AND TRANSEPTS OF THE LOWER CHURCH

perfect conception of religious feeling even among the pictures of Angelico. Unfortunately it can only be seen in the early afternoon when the light comes in through the windows of S. Giovanni; the Madonna rising with queenly grace and the angel hastening forward with his message then stand out from their dark background like living people, and show how, from the first, Giotto attained the power of giving vitality to his figures. His Madonna is not like a

graven image to be worshipped from afar; she is essentially the earthly mother of the Saviour, and Giotto, while treating her story with dignity and a certain sense of remoteness, tells it by the simplest means, endowing her with the maternal tenderness of a young peasant girl whom we meet upon the roads carrying her child to lay beneath the shadow of a tree while she goes to her work in the fields close by.

The Visitation (on the same wall as Cimabue's Madonna) is one of those frescoes that we remember like a scene we have witnessed, so naturally does the Virgin move forward, followed by a group of handmaidens, and hold out her arms to greet Elizabeth who is bending with such reverence to salute her cousin. They stand at the entrance of a dainty house inlaid with mosaic which is set among the bare rocks with only a stunted tree here and there. But Giotto does not forget to place a flowering plant in the balcony just as the peasants have always done in his mountain home.

It is interesting to compare the next fresco of the Nativity with the same subject in the Upper Church, treated by a follower of Cimabue where the same idea is depicted, but with what a difference. Though two episodes are placed in one picture, Giotto succeeds in giving a harmonious composition, which, if a little stiff and over symmetrical, is full of charm and beauty. The angels singing to the new-born Infant and those apprising the shepherds of the news hover like a flight of birds above the barn. They are in truth the winged spirits of the air, "birds of God" Dante calls them, and thus Giotto paints them. As though to accentuate the sadness and poverty of Christ's birthplace, the barn, all open and exposed to the night breezes, is laid in a lonely landscape with a high rock rising behind it.

Beyond in the valley, a leafless tree grows upon the bank of a calm stream where the heavenly light from the angels is seen to play like moonbeams in its waters.

Messrs. Crowe and Cavalcaselle hold that the Visit of the Magi was "never painted with more feeling, more naturally or beautifully composed than here"; and Giotto must have felt he could add little to the perfection of the scene when in later years he painted the same subject at Padua. All interest is centred on the Child, who, bending forward from the Virgin's arms, lays a tiny hand in blessing upon the head of the aged king. Curiously enough St. Joseph has been forgotten, and instead an angel stands upon either side to receive the offerings of the Magi.

But to us the Purification seems even more beautiful in sentiment, composition and the perfection of religious feeling. Giotto was the first to conceive the idea of the Infant Jesus turning from Simeon towards the Virgin Mary as if anxious to come back to her, while she holds out her arms to invite him with a naïve attitude of gentle motherhood.

From charming frescoes like these we come to the grand and powerful scene of the Crucifixion. Every figure tells a different tale of sorrow; of tender pity, as in the group of women round the fainting Virgin; of wonder that Christ should be allowed to suffer, as in the gesture of the woman with arms thrown back and St. John who wrings his hands almost fiercely; of sympathy expressed by the Magdalene, as she kisses the pierced feet; and of hope and prayer, in the kneeling figures of St. Francis and his brethren. Even more vehement in their grief are the angels, who rending their garments fly away with arms stretched out as if unable to bear the sight of so much pain. How rapidly they turn and circle in the air; they are not borne

along by the winds, but trusting to their wings they rise with the swift, sure flight of a swallow.[1]

Upon the opposite wall the early life of the Virgin is continued with the Flight into Egypt, which bears a strong resemblance to the fresco at Padua. There is the same sense that St. Joseph, his bundle slung on a stick over his shoulder like a pilgrim, is really walking along and in a moment must disappear from sight; a palm tree bends sideways to the breeze, and above two angels seem to cleave the air as they hurriedly lead on the travellers to exile and safety. Only the Virgin sits calm and unruffled. In the Massacre of the Innocents Giotto has happily not painted the full horror of the scene, but has aimed rather at suggesting the tragedy than at giving its actual representation. Very beautiful are the women to the left mourning for their dead children. One rocks her child in her arms and tries to awaken him with her kisses, whilst another raises her hands in despair as she gazes upon the dead child upon her knees.

The Return of the Holy Family from Egypt, though only showing a group of houses within surrounding walls and a gateway and a group of people, suggests better than a more complicated composition would have done the scene of a home-coming after long absence.

The Preaching of the Child in the Temple completes the series, and like the one at Padua, it is the least interesting of Giotto's paintings.

There are three other frescoes in the Transept which most people, with reason, attribute to Giotto, repre-

[1] For Simone Martini's Madonna and Saints between the two chapels of this transept, see p. 212. The portraits (?) of some of the first companions of St. Francis, painted beneath Cimabue's fresco, belong to the Florentine school. It would be vain to try and name them.

senting miracles of St. Francis. The first refers to a child of the Spini family of Florence who fell from a tower of the Palazzo Spini (now Feroni), and was being carried to the grave, when the intercession of St. Francis was invoked and he appeared among them to restore the child to life. Part of the fresco has been lost owing to the ruthless way in which the walls were cut into for the purpose of erecting an organ —a barbarous act difficult to understand. But the principal group of people are seen outside an exquisite basilica of marble and mosaic, and each figure can be studied with pleasure as they have not been mutilated by the "restorer's" usual layers of thick paint. Seldom has Giotto painted lovelier women than those kneeling in the foreground, their profiles of delicate and pure outline recalling a border of white flowers. Near them is a figure bearing so strong a resemblance to Dante, that we would fain believe that Giotto meant to represent the type of a true Florentine in a portrait of the poet. Above the staircase is a fine picture of St. Francis resting his hand upon the shoulder of a crowned skeleton "in which," says Messrs. Crowe and Cavalcaselle, "a much deeper study of anatomy is revealed than has ever been conceded to Giotto." The oval face of the saint, with clear brown colouring, is very beautiful, strongly resembling the St. Francis in glory in the fresco above the high altar. By him also is the half-length figure of Christ in the vaulting of the window.

Although the two remaining frescoes deal with the death and resurrection of a child, they probably have nothing to do with the Spini miracle; the one where the dead child is lying in the arms of two men has unfortunately been so repainted as to take all character away from the faces, and we can only admire the general grouping, the fine gestures of the weeping women, and

the grand modelling of the figures. Only a great artist could make one feel, by such simple means, the strain of the dead weight upon the men's arms. The man to the left (the second from the one holding his finger to his chin) is believed to be the portrait of Giotto; if it is, the painter has not flattered himself, and we can believe Dante's tale that he was remarkably ugly, and had six hideous children. On the other side of the arch the legend continues; a procession of white-robed monks and sorrowing friends approach the house to which the child has been taken, but in the meantime St. Francis has called him back to life, and a man, evidently in great excitement over the miracle, is hurrying down the steps to announce what has occurred. The story is so well and simply told that, although we have failed to find any account of it, it is easy to understand the sequence of the two frescoes, and the events they relate.

Allegories by Giotto in the ceiling over the High Altar. —The task was now given to Giotto to depict by the medium of allegory the three virtues of the franciscan order and St. Francis in glory. These virtues, the rocks upon which the franciscan order was so securely founded, had been preached by St. Francis to the people of Italy with the extraordinary results we have seen, and now Giotto came to take up the theme and, by means of his immortal art, perpetuate it as long as the great basilica lasts, and pilgrims come to pray and read upon the walls, in a language even the unlettered can understand, the lessons taught by the Umbrian preacher seven centuries ago. Apart from the fact of his genius, it was a fortunate thing that he should have been chosen for the task. A man of weaker and more impressionable temperament might have been led into such exaggerations of feeling and sentiment as we find in the Lorenzetti frescoes of the transept. Giotto

came not many years after the Flagellants, roaming in hordes through the land calling for mercy and beating their half-naked bodies with leathern thongs, had spread a spirit of fanaticism which threatened to destroy the healthy influence of the teaching of St. Francis. But the mountain-born painter, impervious to such influences, kept his faith pure amidst the turmoil and unrest; and much as he admired the saint (it is said he belonged to the Third order), he looked upon his teaching from the practical point of view and was by no means carried away by the poetical manner in which it had been presented to the people. Nothing shows the mind and character of Giotto so plainly as some lines he wrote on poverty, most likely after painting his famous Allegories when he had an opportunity to observe how little the manners and customs of mediæval monks corresponded with the spirit of their founder. Every line of the poem is full of common sense and knowledge of human frailty. Many, Giotto remarks somewhat sarcastically, praise poverty; but he does not himself recommend it as virtue is seldom co-existent with extremes; and voluntary poverty, upon which he touches in a few caustic lines, is the cause of many ills, and rarely brings peace to those who have chosen her as a mate and who too often study how to avoid her company; thus it happens that under the false mantle of the gentlest of lambs appears the fiercest wolf, and by such hypocrisy is the world corrupted.[1]

Giotto, an artist before he was a moralist, undertook to carry out the wishes of his patrons, and thought only how he could best fill the triangular spaces of the ceiling with the figures of saints and angels. It was by no means an easy task, but Giotto succeeded so well that these four frescoes are reckoned among his

[1] See Vasari, ed. Milanesi, vol. i. p. 426. (Sansoni Firenze.)

THE MARRIAGE OF ST. FRANCIS WITH POVERTY

(D. ANDERSON—*photo*)

masterpieces and the wonders of the thirteenth century. They certainly show a marked advance upon the earlier works in the Transept, but they lack the power and assurance of those in the Upper Church, where the youthful painter all but reached the zenith of his fame.

The Marriage of St. Francis and Poverty.[1]—In this fresco Giotto has represented three incidents, but just as they all refer to one subject, so do the figures form a perfect harmony, faultless as decoration and beautiful as a picture. A youth, imitating the charity of St. Francis to whom his guardian angel is pointing, is seen on the left giving his cloak to a beggar, while upon the other side, a miser clutching his money-bag and a youth with a falcon on his gloved hand refuse to listen to the good suggestions of an angel and of the friar who stands between them. The lines of decoration are further carried out by the two angels who fly up carrying a temple with an enclosed garden, perhaps symbolising Charity, and a franciscan habit, which may be the symbol of Obedience. But these are details and the eye does not rest upon them, but rather is carried straight into the midst of a court of attendant angels where Christ, standing upon a rock, gives the hand of St. Francis to the Lady Poverty, who slightly draws away as if in warning of the hardships and disillusions in store for him who links his life with hers. Cold and white, her garments torn by a network of accacia

[1] It is often supposed that Giotto took the theme of this fresco from the well-known lines of Dante referring to the mystical marriage of St. Francis to Poverty. But Dante wrote the xi. canto of the *Paradiso* long after Giotto had left Assisi; both painter and poet really only followed the legend recounted by St. Bonaventure of how St. Francis met three women who saluted him on the plain of S. Quirico near Siena. These were Poverty, Charity and Obedience.

thorns, she is indeed the true widow of Christ, who, after His death as Dante says,

> ". . . . . slighted and obscure
> Thousand and hundred years and more, remain'd
> Without a single suitor, till he came."[1]

The bridesmaids, Hope pointing to the sky, and Charity holding a heart and crowned with flowers that start into tiny flames, come floating out of the choir of angels towards the pale bride whose veil is bounded only by her hair. Heedless of the children of earth, who encouraged by the barking of a dog, press the thorns still deeper into her flesh, she gazes at St. Francis, and shows him the pink and white roses of paradise and the Madonna lilies which are flowering behind her wings.

Chastity.—The different stages of perfection in the religious life are portrayed in this allegory. To the left St. Francis welcomes three aspirants to the order—Bernard of Quintavalle—typifying the franciscans; St. Clare—the Second Order; and one, who is said to be the poet Dante, in the near foreground in a florentine dress of the period—the Third Order. Two angels in the central group impose hands and pour the purifying water upon the head of a youth standing naked in a font, and two other angels bend forward with the franciscan habits in their hands, while leaning over the wall of the fortress are two figures, one presenting the banner of purity the other the shield of fortitude to the novice. On either side stands a grey-bearded, mail-clad warrior, lash and shield in hand to denote the perpetual warfare and self-mortification of those who follow St. Francis. To the right three youthful warrior-monks, beautiful of feature, bearing the signs of the Passion in their hands, aided by one in

[1] *Paradiso*, xi., Cary's translation.

the garb of a Penitent with angels' wings, are chasing away the tempting spirits of the flesh from the rocks about the fortress into the abyss below. The winged boar falls backwards, followed by a demon and a winged skeleton emblematic of the perpetual death of the wicked, while poor blindfolded Love writhes beneath the lash of Penitence. But just as he is about to spring down with the rest, his string of human hearts still slung across his shoulders, he snatches up a sprig of roses from the rocks.

Above, out of a walled enclosure guarded at each end by towers like every mediæval castle on the hills about Italian towns, rises a crenulated fortress. At the open window of the magnificent central tower is seen Chastity, veiled and in prayer as if unconscious of the scene below, her vigilance typified by the bell o'erhead. She appears to be reading, by the light of a taper, from the open book held before her by an angel, while another is bringing her the palm of sanctity. They are no longer Giotto's bird-like creations, but stately messengers with splendid human forms uplifted by outstretched wings their garments brought into long curved lines by the rapidity of their flight.

Obedience.—Under an open *loggia* sits the winged figure of Obedience in the habit of a franciscan, holding his finger to his lips as he places a wooden yoke (symbol of obedience) upon the neck of a kneeling friar. Prudence, with double face, holding a glass mirror and a compass, and Humility, with her lighted taper to illumine the path to paradise, are seated on either side, perhaps to show that he who imposes obedience upon others must be prudent and humble himself. An angel upon the right is pointing these virtues out to a centaur (symbolizing pride, envy and avarice), who, thrown back upon his haunches by a ray of light from the mirror of Prudence, is

thus stopped from tempting away the young novice kneeling on the opposite side, encouraged in his act of renunciation by the angel who holds him firmly by the wrist. Two divine hands appear from the clouds above and are holding St. Francis by his yoke, while two angels unroll the rules of his order.

The Glory of St. Francis.—The throng of fair-haired angels, seem, as they move towards the throne of the saint and press around it, to be intoning a hymn of perpetual praise and jubilation. Their figures, against the dull gold background, are seen white and strong, with here and there a touch of mauve or pale blue in their garments bringing out more distinctly the feeling of light and joyousness. The perpetual movement of the heavenly choir, some blowing long trumpets, others playing on flutes and tambourines, while many gaze upwards in silent prayer as they float upon the clouds, contrasts strangely with the stiff and silent figure of St. Francis, who in his robe of gold and black brocade, a brilliant light behind him, looks like some marvellous eastern deity, recalling Dante's words of how he

> " . . . arose
> A sun upon the world, as duly this
> From Ganges doth: . . ."

In the dimness of the cave-like church built to serve the purpose of a tomb and keep men's ideas familiar with the thought of death, these frescoes are glimpses into the heaven of the blest. Watch them at all hours of the day and there will be some new wonder to be noted, a face among the crowd which seems fairer than the rest, or, as the sunshine moves across, a flash of colours in an angel's wing like the sudden coming of a rainbow in a cloudy sky. And who shall forget the strange play of fancy as the candle light, during an afternoon service, mingles with the strong

sunshine upon the white figures of saints and the whiter figure of the Lady Poverty, who appear to move towards us from amidst a blaze of golden clouds, until gradually as the evening closes in and the candles go out one by one, they are set once more in the shadow of their backgrounds like so many images of snow.

La Capella del Sacramento, or the Chapel of St. Nicholas. —Giotto left one scholar at Assisi whose work it is easy to discover, but who, as far as name and personality are concerned, is unknown, and shares in the general mystery which surrounds both the builders and painters of San Francesco. All we know is that he followed his master's style and great laws of composition even more closely than Taddeo Gaddi, and that he possessed much charm and originality. By the kind help of Mr Bernhard Berenson we have been able to group together some of the works of this interesting artist, who was evidently working at Assisi between 1300 and 1310 when he executed the last nine frescoes of the Upper Church illustrating the death and the miracles of St. Francis, decorated the Capella del Sacramento in the Lower Church with the legend of St. Nicholas, and painted a fine Crucifixion in the Confraternity of San Rufinuccio (see chap. x). There is a very delightful panel picture also by him in the corridor of the Uffizzi (No. 20 in the corridor), with eight small scenes from the life of St. Cecilia.

In a fresco over the arch on the inside of the Capella del Sacramento are portraits of the donors of the chapel, Cardinal Napoleone Orsini, who is being presented to Christ by St. Francis, and his younger brother Giovanni (below him is written Dñs Joñs Gaetanus frater ejus), presented by St. Nicholas. It helps to date the decoration of the chapel, for we know that Giovanni Orsini received

the cardinal's hat in 1316, while here he is represented in the white dress of a deacon confirming the general opinion that these frescoes must have been painted before that date.[1]

St. Nicholas of Myra, generally known as St. Nicholas of Bari, both during his life and after his death was forever coming to the assistance of the oppressed; he did not even object to be the patron saint of drunkards and thieves, as well as of maiden virtue. He can easily be recognised in art by the three purses or golden balls which are always placed at his feet, in reference to the first kind action he performed when a wealthy young noble. This incident is charmingly recorded in the chapel upon the right wall near the entrance. Three sleeping maidens are lying by their father's side, and St. Nicholas, who has heard of their poverty, throws in three bags of gold as he passes by the open window. This charitable deed has made him a famous saint; when Dante is in Purgatory he hears the spirit of Hugh Capet recounting various acts of virtuous poverty and generosity, among which

> ". . . it spake the gift
> Of Nicholas, which on the maidens he
> Bounteous bestow'd, to save their youthful prime
> Unblemish'd. . . ."

Below (the picture immediately beneath is entirely obliterated) is a very beautiful composition, recalling the same artist's treatment of St. Clare and her nuns in the Upper Church. In front of a Gothic chapel of white and black marble stands St. Nicholas, between

[1] This fact alone would disprove the idea that Giottino, who was born in 1324, could have been the author of these frescoes. Everything that cannot be attributed to other painters is put down as his work, so that we have many pictures and frescoes of totally different styles assigned to Giottino.

two placid and portly friars, listening to the petition of a despairing father who implores his protection for his three sons, unjustly condemned to death by a wicked consul. The figures of the prisoners, with halters round their necks, followed by sympathising friends, are full of movement and life; St. Nicholas is particularly charming, dressed in his episcopal robes, slightly bending forward and listening attentively to the doleful tale.[1]

The legend is continued upon the opposite side, where he arrives just in time to save the youths. The figure of the kneeling victim expecting the blow every moment to fall upon his neck and the majestic attitude of the saint in the act of seizing the sword, are finely rendered, but Giotto would hardly have approved of the complicated building decked with much superfluous decoration which is supposed to represent the city gate.

The fresco below relates a vision of the Emperor Constantine who had ordered his three generals, unjustly accused of treason, to be put to death. St. Nicholas appears and commands him to release the prisoners, who are in a wooden cage by the bed.

High up in the lunette of this wall is an interesting fresco referring to a humorous incident of one of the saint's miracles. It appears that a Jew, hearing that St. Nicholas gave special protection to property, placed a statue of him in his house; but it must be remembered that St. Nicholas was also the patron of thieves, and one day all the Jew's possessions disappeared. Enraged by the failure of his plan he administered a sound thrashing to the statue, which stands in a beautiful niche with spiral columns, behaving much in the

[1] Some say this fresco represents the three youths begging St. Nicholas to pardon the consul who had condemned them to death, in which case it would come after the scene of the execution on the opposite wall.

same way as the childish sons of faith in Southern Italy who turn the Madonna's picture to the wall when their prayers have not been effectual. In this case St. Nicholas was so deeply offended that he appeared in a vision to the thieves, who kindly restored the goods of the irate Jew. There are dim remains of frescoes on this wall, but it is impossible to make out what they represent. Other wonderful miracles are related upon the opposite side, beginning high up in the lunette, where, with some difficulty, we distinguished St. Nicholas restoring a child to life who has been taken from his parents and killed by evil spirits. Below is a scene in a banquetting hall, where a king, seated at table, takes a goblet of wine from the hand of a slave boy. St. Nicholas, in full episcopals, performs one of his many ærial flights, lays his hand upon the boy's head and carries him back to his parents. In the scene beneath St. Nicholas is restoring to his people another youth, who, it seems, was nearly drowned while filling a goblet with water for the altar of St. Nicholas; or it may be the continuation of the preceding legend, and show the home-coming of the captive boy from the king's palace. It is one of the most charmingly rendered of the series; the impetuous action of the mother rising with outstretched arms to welcome her son, and the calm dignity of the father's embrace, are almost worthy of Giotto himself. A small dog bounds forward to add his welcome to the others, while St. Nicholas surveys the scene with great gravity, every line of his figure denoting dignity, power and repose.

On one side of the arched entrance to the chapel is a fresco of St. Mary Magdalen, on the opposite side is St. John the Baptist, and in the vaulting of the arch, on the right, are St. Anthony of Padua with St. Francis; St. Albino with St. George; St. Agnes

holding a lamb, perhaps the most graceful of the figures, with St. Cecilia crowned with roses. Opposite are St. Rufino and St. Nicholas holding a book; St. Sabino and St. Vittorino, both Assisan martyrs; and St. Claire with St. Catherine of Alexandria. But the quality of this artist will be only half realised if the single figures of the apostles on the walls below the scenes from the life of Nicholas are overlooked. Very grave and reposeful they lend an air of great solemnity to the chapel, and as Messrs. Crowe and Cavalcaselle remark, they are "after those of Giotto in the Ciborium of Rome, the most admirable that were produced in the early times of the revival. . . ."

It is as difficult to explain why the Chapel of St. Nicholas possesses so much charm, as it is to understand why people seldom spend more than sufficient time to read the few lines in their guide-book about it and verify for themselves that the frescoes are there; but perhaps when some fifty frescoes by Giotto have to be realised in about an hour, which is the time usually devoted to them by the visitor to Assisi, it is not surprising that Giotto's follower, the closest and the best he ever had, should be neglected.

The stained glass windows, remarkable rather for their harmony than for their depth of tone, belong also to the early part of the fourteenth century, and are decorated with the Orsini arms. On the left side of the central window is a charming design of St. Francis in a rose-coloured mantle, recommending to Christ the young Giovanni Gaetano Orsini, who is said to be buried in the chapel. His monument behind the altar, erected soon after his death in 1347, is, according to Vasari, the work of Agostino da Siena, a pupil of Giovanni Pisano. Very calm and youthful-looking the Cardinal lies at full length in long folded robes while two angels guard his slumbers.

There is yet another treasure in St. Nicholas' Chapel; a lovely picture on panel of the Virgin and saints (rather difficult to see as it is against the light over the altar), by a Sienese artist who possesses some of Simone Martini's talent of depicting ethereal and serene Madonnas.

The Chapel of St. Maria Maddalena.—According to a legend given by Padre Angeli the chapel was built and consecrated by St. Bonaventure while General of the franciscan order towards the end of the thirteenth century. The three frescoes on the left wall certainly belong to Giotto's time, and if not actually painted by him they appear to be from his designs, and not merely copies of the Paduan frescoes which they resemble. Above the frescoes of the Raising of Lazarus and the Anointing of Christ's feet is the Communion of the Magdalen, rendered with such simplicity yet with so much religious feeling and solemnity that we realise it is indeed the last communion of the saint on earth. The attitude of the priest, the splendid drapery of the man in orange-coloured garments, and the way in which the figure of the saint being carried by angels to heaven completes the composition, bear unmistakably the impress of Giotto's style before the Paduan period (1206).

The "Noli mi Tangere" upon the opposite wall may also have been designed by him, but the type of the faces are heavier than his, and the angels are no longer swift spirits of the heavens ending in flame and cloud.

The painter, as if wishing to remind the faithful of the new life symbolised in the resurrection of Christ, has covered the rocks and ground with flowering rose-bushes and exquisitely designed tufts of ferns and leaves.

The story of the Prince and Princess of Marseilles is a favourite subject with the Giottesque school. The legend tells that when Mary Magdalen arrived at Marseilles with Lazarus and Martha, she met a prince and

his wife who were praying to the gods for a son, and she persuaded them to pray instead to the God of the Christians. Their desire was granted, and they were converted, but evidently being of a cautious turn of mind, they resolved to sail at once for Jerusalem and find out if St. Peter's teaching agreed with that of the Magdalen. On the way a terrible storm arose, and during the tempest the princess gave birth to a son, and died. The sailors insisted that her body must be thrown overboard or the storm, they said, would not abate; at last the prince was forced to lay the body of his wife upon a rocky island in the midst of the ocean, and calling upon Mary Magdalen for help, he left the child wrapt in the cloak of its dead mother by her side and continued the journey to the Holy Land. His visit to St. Peter ended in his complete conversion, and upon his return to France he stopped at the rocky island where he found his wife and son alive and well, thanks to the prayers of St. Mary Magdalen. They returned to Marseilles, the vessel being guided by angels, and the whole town became Christian.

Above the arch facing the altar is a very charming fresco of the Magdalen standing at the entrance of a cave, her hair falling like a mantle of cloth of gold about her, to receive the gift of a garment from a charitable hermit who had heard of her life of austerity and privation among the mountains of Provence.

The single figures of St. Clare, St. Mary Magdalen and St. Rufino, as well as the saints in the vaulting opposite the altar, no longer follow Giotto's designs and are far inferior to the other frescoes. Teobaldo Pontano, Bishop of Assisi between 1314 and 1329, is supposed to be the kneeling figure at the feet of St. Rufino as donor of the chapel. It is so unlikely Giotto should have repeated his later Paduan designs in a feebler manner,

as seen here, or that a pupil should have slavishly copied them, that it seems more probable the chapel dates from the time of St. Bonaventure, when its decoration may have been begun by Giotto and completed by some later Florentine follower called in by the bishop who desired to be buried here. The Pontano arms decorate the beautiful stained glass windows, which certainly date from the first half of the fourteenth century, and are the finest in the Lower Church with the exception of those in St. Martin's chapel. Each figure has a claim on our admiration, but especially lovely is the figure of the Magdalen whose hair falls to her feet in heavy waves of deepest gold. In the last division of the right window is the death of the saint, with the lions at her feet which are supposed to have dug her grave.

The Chapel of St. Antonio di Padova.—Built by the Assisan family of Lelli in the fourteenth century, it was once ornamented by Florentine frescoes of the same date which were destroyed when the roof fell in, and it has now nothing of interest save the windows. These contain some naïve scenes from the life of St. Anthony; among them may be noticed his preaching to the fish which raise their heads above the water to listen.

Chapel of San Stefano.—This like the last, has only very decadent frescoes by Adone Doni and is solely interesting for its windows (second half of fourteenth century), where below the symbols of the Evangelists are single figures of saints, among them King Louis and the royal Bishop of Toulouse. Cardinal Gentile di Montefiore, founder of the chapel of S. Martino, was also the donor of this one and is represented in the right window with his crest, a tree growing out of a blue mound against an orange background.

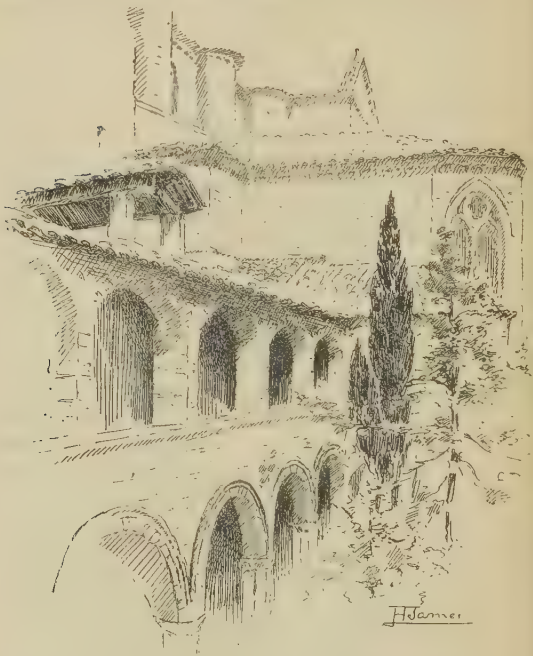
The Chapel of St. Catherine, or Capella del Crocifisso.

—This chapel was built by order of Cardinal Albornoz towards the end of the fourteenth century when on his passage through Umbria to reconquer the rebellious cities for the Roman Pontiff. He conceived at Assisi so great a love for the memory of St. Francis that he desired to be buried there; but though his body was brought to Assisi from Viterbo where he died in 1367, it was afterwards carried to his bishopric at Toledo "at small expense," writes an economical chronicler, "upon men's shoulders"; only a cardinal's hat, suspended from the roof of the chapel, now remains to remind us of the warlike Spanish prelate. The frescoes here have been assigned to that mythical person Buffalmaco, of whom Vasari relates such humorous tales. All we can say is that they belong to the second half of the fourteenth century and are not very pleasing scenes from the life and martyrdom of St. Catherine of Alexandria, with a fresco of Cardinal Albornoz receiving consecration from a pope under the auspices of St. Francis. The windows are the first things to shine out amidst the gloom as one enters the Lower Church. Especially attractive are the figures of St. Francis and St. Clare, their cloaks of the colour of a tea-rose, and of the other saints in green and russet-brown standing in a frame of twisted ribbons tied in bows above their heads. Unfortunately the glass has been repaired in some places by careless modern workers and we see such strange results as the large head of a bearded man upon the body of St. Catherine, high up in the left hand window.

The Chapel of St. Anthony the Abbot.[1]—About 1367 two monuments were erected in this chapel over the sepulchres of two murdered princes—Messer Fer-

[1] The tabernacle on the altar is the work of Giulio Danti, after a design by Galeazzo Alessi, both Perugians, in 1570.

dinando Blasco, nephew of the Cardinal Albornoz, and his son Garzia. Some say they met their death at Spoleto where the father was vice-governor, others that they were killed at Assisi close to the



THE OLD CEMETERY OF SAN FRANCESCO

convent of S. Appolinare by the citizens before they submitted to the kindly rule of the Cardinal. The chapel had been built by a liberal Assisan gentleman who also left money for its decoration; but if there were paintings (Vasari mentions some by Pace

di Fænza) nothing now remains but a rather feeble picture by a scholar of Pinturicchio. The white stone monuments, the white-washed walls and the total absence of colour gives an uncared-for look to this out-of-the way corner of the church. A much brighter spot is the old cemetery opening out of this chapel, which was built in the fourteenth century with the intention of adorning it with frescoes in imitation of the Campo Santo at Pisa. The double cloister seen against a background of cypresses and firs, above which rises the northern side of the Basilica, form a pretty group of buildings, and can be better enjoyed now than in former days, when the bones of Assisan nobles and franciscan friars were piled in the open galleries.

The Basilica of San Francesco became the burial place, not only of some of the saint's immediate followers, but also of many distinguished personages. The large stone tomb at the end of the church is always pointed out as that of "Ecuba," Queen of Cyprus, who is said to have come to Assisi in 1229 to give thanks for having been cured of an illness by the intercession of St. Francis, when she gave the porphyry vase full of ultramarine which is still to be seen, though now empty of its precious contents. She is said to have died in 1240, and to have been buried in San Francesco. But this "Ecuba" is a mysterious person not to be found in the history of her country, which has led some writers to say that it is Iolanthe, the second wife of Frederick II, who lies here. It is one of those tombs common in the time of Giovanni Pisani, but bearing only a faint resemblance to his masterpiece in the Church of San Domenico in Perugia. "On one side," says Vasari, in surprise at the novelty of the style, "the Queen, seated upon a chair, places her right leg over the left in a singular and modern

manner, which position for a lady is ungraceful, and cannot be regarded as a suitable action for a royal monument."

The tomb to the right was erected soon after 1479 in memory of Niccolò Specchi, an Assisan physician of renown attached to the persons of Eugenius IV, and Niccolò V.

Tomb of St. Francis.—Although it had always been supposed that St. Francis lay beneath the high altar, no one knew precisely the spot where Elias had hidden him. In the last centuries many attempts were made to find the tomb by driving galleries in every direction into the bed of rock on which the Basilica stands;[1] but all failed, until more energetic measures were taken in 1818. And after fifty nights of hard work, conducted with the greatest secrecy (it would seem as though the spirit of Elias still presided over the workers), below the high altar, encased in blocks of travertine taken from the Roman wall near the temple of Minerva, and fitted together neatly as those of an Etruscan wall, was found the sepulchral urn of St. Francis. It was evidently the same in which he had been laid in the Church of San Giorgio, untouched till that day. Round the skeleton were found various objects, placed, perhaps, by the Assisans, who in this seem to have followed the custom of their earliest ancestors, as offerings to the dead. There were several silver

[1] How right Elias was to hide the body of St. Francis in so secure a place is shown by the various endeavours made by the Perugians to secure the holy relics for their town. In the fifteenth century they attempted, while at war with Assisi, to carry off the body by force, and failing, had recourse to diplomacy. They represented to Eugenius IV, that it would be far safer at Perugia, and begged him to entrust them with it. He denied his "dear sons'" request on the plea that the Assisans would be brought to the verge of despair and their city to ruin.

coins, amongst them some of Lucca of 1181 and 1208, and a Roman ring of the second century, with the figure of Pallas holding a Victory in her right hand engraved on a red cornelian. Five Umbrian bishops, four cardinals, numberless priests and archæologists visited the spot to verify the truth of the discovery, and finally published the tidings far and wide, which brought greater crowds than ever to Assisi, and among them no less a personage than the Emperor Francis I, of Austria. Donations poured in for building a chapel beneath the Lower Church round the saint's tomb, and in six months the work was completed by Giuseppe Brizzi of Assisi. The citizens, in their zeal, decorated it with marble altars and statues, until the tradition treasured by the people of a hidden chapel below the Basilica and rivalling it in richness was almost realised, and they flocked down the dark staircases with lighted torches to witness the accomplishment of the legends weaved by their forefathers (see p. 136). It is a most impressive sight to attend mass here with the peasants in early morning ere they go forth to their work in the fields. Silently they kneel with bowed heads near the tomb, touching it now and again through the grating with their rosaries; the acolytes move slowly about the altar and the voices of the priests are hushed, for here at least all feel the solemnity of a religious rite. The candles burn dimly with a smoky flame, the sanctuary lamps cast a flickering red light upon the marble pavement and the walls cut out of the living rock, and with the darkness which seems to press around is the damp smell, reminding us that we are indeed in the very bowels of the Assisan mountain.

CHAPTER VII

The Sienese Masters in the Lower Church. The Convent

. "Je donnerais pour ce caveau toutes les églises de Rome."—H. TAINE. *Voyages en Italie. Pérouse et Assisi.*

THE CHAPEL OF ST. MARTIN[1]

THE best masters of Tuscany having, by the beginning of the thirteenth century, covered most of the walls of San Francesco with choice work, it now remained for Siena to send artists to complete their loveliness by effigies of calmly sweet Madonnas and saints whose gentle beauty seemed rightly fitted for their Umbrian surroundings.

The first to come, probably very few years after Giotto had left, was Simone Martini, "the most lovable," Mr Berenson calls him, "of all the artists before the Renaissance."[2] He married Giovanna Memmi, a Sienese, whose brother Lippo Memmi often helped him in minor works; this may account for the confusion between the two, and why he is so often called by his brother-in-law's surname. One of

[1] The donor of this chapel was Gentile de Monteflori, a franciscan, created cardinal in 1298 by Boniface VIII.

[2] Simone was born at Siena in 1283, and died at Avignon in 1344. He belonged to the school of Duccio, though influenced to some degree by his contemporary Giotto, whose work at Assisi he had full opportunity to study

the artist's claims to immortality, the highest, according to Vasari who was not partial to the Sienese, was the praise he won from Petrarch for the portraits he painted on more than one occasion of Madonna Laura. Simone's talents were sung by the "love-devoted" Tuscan poet who calls him "mio Simon," and in one perfect sonnet tells how he must surely have been in paradise and seen the loveliness of Madonna Laura, as he has drawn her features with such fidelity that all on earth must perforce acknowledge her beauty.

The Chapel of St. Martin at Assisi is filled with such faces as Petrarch describes. It possesses, too, all the varied colour of a garden, only a garden not inhabited by earthly mortals, but by gentle knights and fairy kings wearing wonderful crowns of beaten gold, with cherub's heads, flowers and moons upon their surface, and women who hold their lilies with caressing fingers. All gives way before his sense of the beautiful, the ornate and the charming, so that he creates a world apart of saints and angels with a feeling of remoteness about them which is one of the most striking features of his art. He loved all that was joyous; he depicted no tragic scenes; his saints have already won their crowns in heaven, his kings are conquerors, and around a death-bed the angels sing. He may sometimes fail as a story-teller, and his compositions do not always give the same sense of perfection as those of other stronger artists, but his very faults are lovable, and all can be forgiven for the exquisite finish of his paintings, which, in their brilliant colouring, are like a piece of old embroidery where design and hues have been woven in by patient fingers. "To convey his feeling for beauty and grace and splendour," says Mr Berenson, "Simone possessed means more than sufficient. He was a master of colour as few have been before him or after him. He had a feeling for line

always remarkable, and once, at least, attaining to a degree of perfection not to be surpassed. He understood decorative effects as a great musician understands his instruments." [1]

It is a little difficult to find out where Simone begins his legend of St. Martin, as he seems to have fitted in the different scenes just where he could, thinking, as was only right, more of the effect of decoration than of the sequence of the story. The two frescoes on the left wall refer to the well-known act of charity, when St. Martin, a young Lombard soldier serving in the army of the Emperor Constantine in Gaul, met, on a bitter winter's day, a beggar outside the gates of Amiens, and having nothing but the clothes he wore divided his cloak with the poor man. It is not one of Simone's pleasing compositions; far better is the next where Christ appears to the saint in a dream, wearing the cloak he had given in charity and saying to the angels who surround him: "Know ye who hath thus arrayed me? My servant Martin, though yet unbaptised, hath done this." The face of the young saint is very calm and palely outlined against his golden aureole as he lies asleep, clasping his throat gently with one hand. With what patience has Simone drawn the open-work of the sheets, the pattern on the counterpane, the curtain about the bed; no detail has been passed over. And who can forget his angels, the profile of one, the thick waving hair of another, and the grand pose of the standing figure, a little behind Christ, whose head is poised so statelily upon a well-moulded neck.

Exactly opposite are two scenes belonging to the early times of the saint's life when he was yet a soldier. In one the Emperor Constantine is giving

[1] *Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, B. Berenson, p. 47.

THE KNIGHTHOOD OF ST. MARTIN BY SIMONE MARTINI

(D. ANDERSON—*photo*)

him his sword, while an attendant buckles on the spurs of knighthood; here also, as in most of the frescoes, we pick out single figures to dwell on, such as the youth with a falcon on his wrist, whose profile is clearly outlined yet tender, with that pale red-golden tinge over the face by which Simone always charms us. Remarkable for grace and motion is the man playing on the mandoline, with a sad dreamy face, who seems to sway to the sounds of his own music; whilst almost comic is the player on the double pipes, with his curious headgear and tartan cloak.

The next scene is divided by a rocky ridge, behind which is seen the army of the Gauls, who, by the way, have Assisan lions on their shields. St. Martin, after refusing to accept his share of the donations to the soldiers, declares his intention of leaving the army to become a priest, and when accused of cowardice by the Emperor, he offers to go forth and meet the enemy without sword or shield. Simone pictures him as he steps forth upon the perilous enterprise, holding the cross and pointing to the sky, as he refuses the helmet held out to him by the Emperor. Next day, says the legend, the Gauls laid down their arms, having submitted to the word of St. Martin who was then allowed to quit the world for the religious life.

On the opposite wall, above the apparition of Christ with the cloak, we see St. Martin no longer in soldier's garb, but as the holy Bishop of Tours. The saint has fallen into a reverie whilst saying mass, and in vain a priest tries to rouse him by laying a hand upon his shoulder for his eyes remain closed, and the kneeling priest waits patiently with the book of the Gospels upon his knee. Simone never surpassed the dignity, the religious feeling, the quiet repose and ease expressed in the figure of St. Martin; while he has kept the scene as simple as one of Giotto's frescoes, thus

making it the most perfect among these compositions. To the left is a much ruined picture of the restoration of a child to life through the prayers of the saint, who was preaching at Chartres. Among a crowd of people one figure, with a Florentine headgear such as Andrea del Castagno paints, stands clearly out; below a small child can be discerned stretching out little hands towards the kneeling bishop.

Above this again, almost too high to be clearly seen, is the death of St. Hilary of Poitiers, at which St. Martin assisted. One of the mourners has a mantle of turquoise blue, a beautiful piece of colour like the sky seen through the arches of the Gothic windows.

On the other wall, over the fresco where St. Martin receives knighthood, is recorded the legend of how "as he went to the church on a certain day, meeting a poor man naked, he gave him his inner robe, and covered himself as he best might with his cope. And the archdeacon, indignant, offering him a short and narrow vestment, he received it humbly, and went up to celebrate mass. And a globe of fire appeared above his head, and when he elevated the host, his arms being exposed by the shortness of the sleeves, they were miraculously covered with chains of gold and silver, suspended on them by angels."[1]

The next picture, which is very ruined, represents the visit of St. Martin to the Emperor Valentinian, who, because he had rudely kept his seat in his presence, suddenly found it to be on fire, and, as the legend says, "he burnt that part of his body upon which he sat, whereupon, being compelled to rise, contrite and ashamed, he embraced Martin, and granted all that he required of him."

Above this is the death of St. Martin, with a grace-

[1] *Sketches of the History of Christian Art*, by Lord Lindsay, p. 134, vol. i.

ful flight of angels hovering over the bier singing as they prepare to carry his soul to heaven. Very fine is the fresco in the lunette of the entrance, where Cardinal Gentile, in his franciscan habit, is kneeling before the saint who bends forward to raise him from so humble a position. But in the single figures of saints, in the arch of this chapel, standing like guardian deities within their Gothic niches, Simone rivals greater artists in grace and strange beauty. In honour of the franciscan donor the chief franciscan saints are depicted beside two others of universal fame. St. Francis and St. Anthony of Padua, and below them St. Catherine of Alexandria and St. Mary Magdalen; on the other side, St. Louis, King of France and St. Louis, Bishop of Toulouse, and below them St. Clare and St. Elisabeth of Hungary. Nowhere has St. Clare received so true an interpretation of her gentle saintliness as in this painting by Simone, and he has surpassed his other works in the exquisite drawing of the hand which holds her habit to one side. It would seem as though in these saints he had attained the limits of his power of expressing types of pure beauty, were it not for the half figures in the embrasures of the window of such finish and subtle charm as to haunt us like some strain of long remembered music. There is a bishop in a cope of creamy white with gold embroidery, a hermit with a long brown beard, and saints who calmly pray with clasped hands. The broad white band of pale shadowed fur is low enough to show the graceful line of the neck of the young saint in the left hand window, his hair tinged with pale red and his face so fair as to seem a shadow upon the wall, coming and going in the play of light.

So enthralling is the study of the frescoes that it is possible to leave the chapel without noticing the stained-glass windows, perhaps the loveliest in the church

where all are lovely. They seem to belong to the same epoch as the paintings, and in one or two instances a figure may have been inspired by them, such as the angels with sword and shield who resemble Simone's angels in the upper part of the fresco of St. Martin's death. Cardinal Gentile was in all probability the donor of these as well as of the chapel, for he is represented in the central window kneeling before St. Martin, who is in full episcopals. These windows are dazzling; there are warriors in red and green, saints standing against circles of cream-tinted leaves, St. Jerome in magenta-coloured vestments harmonising strangely with the crimson of his cardinal's hat; and St. Anthony of Padua in violet shaded with paler lights as on the petals of a Florentine iris. A saint in white is placed against a scarlet background, another in pale china blue against a sky of deep Madonna blue, and all these colours lie side by side like masses of jewels of every shade

On leaving we find to the left of the papal throne a small chapel ornamented only by a window which has an apostle standing in a plain Gothic niche, the ruby red and tawny yellow of his mantle making a brilliant patch of colour in this dark corner of the church. The head is modern, but the figure, the circular pattern beneath, and the right half of the window with five medallions, are, according to Herr Thode, the oldest pieces of coloured glass in the lower church.

Just above the papal throne is a handsomely worked ambo in red marble and mosaic, forming a kind of pulpit from which many illustrious people have preached, among them St. Bonaventure and St. Bernardine of Siena. In the recess a Florentine artist of the fourteenth century has painted the Coronation of the Virgin, a fresco worthy of its beautiful setting; and there is a crucifixion and

scenes from the martyrdom of St. Stanislaus of Poland by a follower of Pietro Lorenzetti, pupil of Simone Martini. St. Stanislaus was canonised in 1253 when Innocent IV, came to consecrate the Basilica, and upon this occasion a miracle took place which redounds to the honour of the saint. While Cardinal de Conti (afterwards Alexander IV,) was preaching, one of the capitals of a pillar above the pulpit fell upon the head of a woman in the congregation, and thinking she was dead, as she had sunk down without a groan, her neighbours covered her over with a cloak "so as not to disturb the solemnity of the occasion." But to their amazement when the sermon ended the woman rose up and gave thanks to St. Stanislaus, for the blow, far from doing her harm, had cured her of headaches to which she had been subject. The legend would long since have been forgotten, were it not that the capital which fell on that memorable day is still suspended by chains in the opposite corner of the nave, and often puzzles the visitor who does not know its history.

Below the pulpit is a slab of red marble let into the wall with these simple words inscribed: "Hic jacet Jacoba sancta nobilisque romana," by which the Assisans commemorated the burial place of Madonna Giacoma da Settesoli the friend of St. Francis, who after his death lived at Assisi and followed the rule of the Third order until she died in 1239 (see p. 114).

Left Transept.—To Pietro Lorenzetti was given the work of decorating these walls with scenes from the Passion, and so far as completing the rich colour of the church be succeeded. But when studied as separate compositions they betray the weakness of an artist who, as Mr. Berenson remarks, "carries Duccio's themes to the utmost pitch of frantic feeling." Great prominence is given to the subject

of the crucifixion where the vehement actions of the figures rather than the nobility of the types are pre-eminent. It may be of interest to some that the man on the white horse is said to be Gualtieri, Duke of Athens, the tyrant of Florence, whose arms Vasari says he discovered in the fresco which he describes as the work of Pietro Cavallini.

A curious composition is that on the opposite wall where the disciples sit in awkward attitudes and the servants in the kitchen are seen cleaning the dishes while a dog hastily licks up the scraps. It would be difficult to know this represented a religious scene were it not for the large aureoles of the apostles. Nor has Pietro succeeded in giving solemnity to the scene of the Stigmata, where the strained position of St. Francis and the agitated movement of the Seraph partake of the general characteristics of these frescoes. But in his Madonna, St. Francis and St. John the Evangelist, below the crucifixion, Pietro Lorenzetti gives his very best and their faces we remember together with the saints of Simone Martini. Referring to this fresco M. Berenson says: "At Assisi, in a fresco by Pietro, of such relief and such enamel as to seem contrived of ivory and gold rather than painted, the Madonna holds back heart-broken tears as she looks fixedly at her child, who, Babe though he is, addresses her earnestly; but she remains unconsoled."[1]

Chapel of S. Giovanni Battista.[2]—Another lovely work by Pietro Lorenzetti is the triptych over the altar, the Madonna, St. Francis and St. John the Baptist, but here the action of the child leaning to-

[1] *The Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance.* Bernhard Berenson, p. 48.

[2] Built by the Orsini brothers, the founders of the Chapel del Sacramento, in the beginning of the fourteenth century.

wards the Virgin and holding the end of her veil, is more caressing and suggestive of babyhood. Above are small heads of angels like those Pietro places in medallions round the frescoes in the south transept. This, and the panel picture over the altar in the opposite chapel, complete the works of the Sienese school in Assisi. The Umbrian school is represented by a large and unsympathetic picture by Lo Spagna (dated 1526), which is however considered by local admirers of the painter to be his masterpiece. It is a relief to turn from his yellow-eyed saints and hard colouring to the windows of this chapel which are remarkable for their harmony and depth of tone.[1] The figures of the central window date from the second half of the thirteenth century, those of the left window are at least two centuries later.

The Sacristies.—These open out of St. Giovanni's Chapel. Both are ornamented with handsomely carved cupboards of the sixteenth century where the friars store their vestments and costly lace, and which once were full of gold and silver vessels amassed during many centuries. But often during mediæval times of warfare the friars had to stand aside and see the sacristies sacked by the Perugians, or even the Assisans, when they must have envied the peace of mind of the first franciscans who, possessing nothing, could have no fear of robbers.[2]

[1] It is curious that the early Umbrian painters had so little share in the decoration of the franciscan Basilica, the only other picture of the school is the one in the Chapel of St. Anthony the Abbot, and a fresco by some scholar of Ottaviano Nelli on the wall near the entrance of the Lower Church.

[2] Not only had the friars to guard their own things, but also the vast treasures of the Popes who, especially during their sojourn at Avignon, found San Francesco a convenient storehouse. See on p. 20 for the story of how these goods were stolen by the citizens and the penalty this brought upon the town.

Devoted as the citizens were to the memory of St. Francis they do not seem to have hesitated, when in want of money, to help themselves liberally to the things in his church. At one time when the Baglioni were besieging Assisi, her despot Jacopo Fiumi gathered the citizens about him, and in an eloquent harangue called upon them to rob the church at once before the enemy had entered the gates, lest the treasure should fall into the hands of the Perugians. So the sacristies were rifled, and with the proceeds Jacopo Fiumi rebuilt the walls and the palaces which had fallen to ruin during the incessant fighting of past years. The next plunderers were the soldiers of Napoleon, and it is a marvel that so many things still remain. A cupboard in the inner sacristy contains a beautiful cross of rock-crystal ornamented with miniatures in blue enamel brought by St. Bonaventure as a gift from St. Louis of France; there is also the second rule of St. Francis which was sanctioned by Honorius III. Even more precious is a small and crumpled piece of parchment, with a blessing written in the big child-like writing of St. Francis, which he gave to Brother Leo at La Vernia after he had received the Stigmata. On one side he wrote part of the Laudes Creatoris, upon the other the biblical blessing:

> "*Benedicat tibi Dominus et custodiat te:*
> *Ostendat faciem suam tibi et misereatur tui:*
> *Convertat vultum suam ad te et de tibi pacem*":

and then below:

> "*Dominus benedicat te, Frate Leo.*"

Instead of the Latin, the saint signs with the Thau cross, which is of the shape of the mediæval gallows, and may have been yet another way of showing his

humility by humbling himself even to the level of malefactors. Many pages have been written about this relic; the line by Brother Leo in explanation below the signature of St. Francis:

"*Simili modo fecit istud signum Thau cum capite manu sua,*"

has puzzled many people, but in a pamphlet by Mr Montgomery Carmichael [1] it has received a plausible translation. He thinks that *cum capite* refers to the small knob at the top of the Thau, by which St. Francis meant to represent a malefactor's head; the line would read thus: "in like manner with his own hand he made a cross with a head," and not "with his own head," as some believe. Mr Carmichael thinks the curious mound out of which the cross rises is a rough drawing of La Vernia. Above the benediction, in neatly formed letters, Brother Leo has written a short account of the sojourn at the Sacred Mount and of the Vision of the Seraph. This relic has been mentioned in the archives of the convent since 1348, and is always carried in procession at the commencement of the feast of the "Perdono" on July 31st.

Almost more honoured by the faithful is the "Sacred Veil of the most Holy Virgin," which can only be exposed to the public in the presence of the Bishop of Assisi, and is shown in times of pilgrimage when the sacristy and church are full of men and women waiting for their turn to kiss the holy relic.

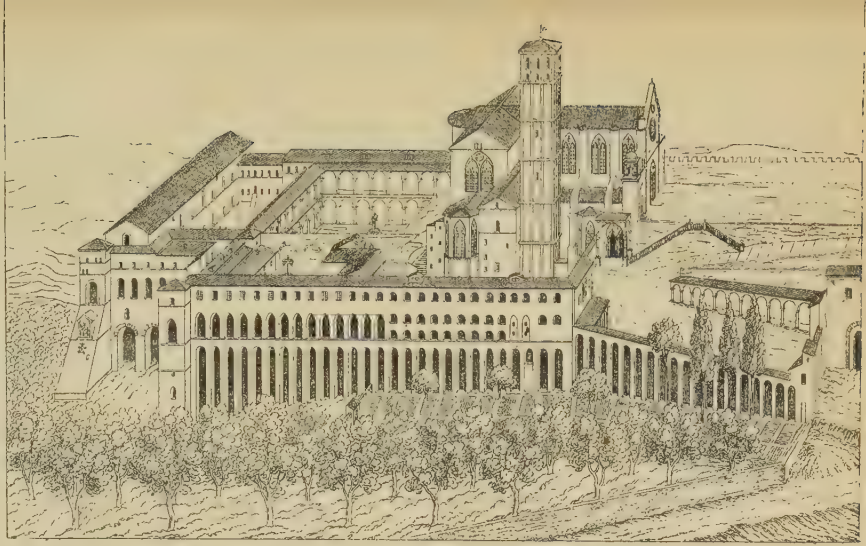
The picture over the door, painted by Giunta Pisano (?) is always pointed out as a portrait of St. Francis, but as the painter's first visit to Assisi was in 1230 he can only have seen the body of the saint borne to its last resting-place in the Basilica, and even that is doubtful when we remember with

[1] *La Benedizione di San Francesco*, Livorno, 1900

what secrecy the burial was performed. Here the face is pointed and emaciated, with a curious look in the eyes as though Giunta had desired to record his blindness. The figure is surrounded by small scenes from the miracles of St. Francis, performed during his lifetime and at his tomb in San Giorgio. But though in the so-called portraits of the saint, the artists think more of representing him as the symbol of aceticism and sanctity than of aiming at giving a true likeness, both this picture and a fresco painted in 1216 at Subiaco when the saint stayed there on his way to Spain, are not very dissimilar from the graphic description left us by Celano. He tells us that St. Francis "was rather below the middle stature with a small round head and a long pinched face, a full but narrow forehead and candid black eyes of medium size, his hair likewise was black; the brows were straight, the nose well-proportioned, thin and straight, the ears erect but small, and the temples flat; his speech was kindly, yet ardent and incisive; his voice powerful, sweet, clear and sonorous; his teeth were regular, white and set close; his lips thin and mobile, his beard was black and scant, his neck thin, his shoulders square; the arms were short, the hands small with long fingers and almond-shaped nails, his legs were thin, his feet small, his skin delicate, and he was very thin. . . ."

Right Transept.[1]—On the walls between the Chapels of the Sacramento and of St. Maria Maddalena, Simone Martini has left some of his loveliest work in the half figures of franciscan saints he places near the Madonna. These are St. Francis, St. Louis of Toulouse, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, St. Clare clothed in the habit

[1] See chapter vi. p. 171 for description of the frescoes here, and of those above the altar. For Cimabue's Madonna on the right wall of the Transept see chapter v. p. 155.



BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE BASILICA AND CONVENT OF SAN FRANCESCO, FROM A DRAWING MADE IN 1820

of her order, always to be recognised when painted by Simone by her heavy plaits of hair, St. Anthony of Padua with the lily, St. Louis of France with a crown of *fleur-de-lis*, and upon the right of the Virgin, a noble saint who may be Helen the mother of King Louis, as she too holds a sceptre with the lily of France on the top. Never had saints so majestic a queen as Simone's Madonna. The subdued greens and tawny reds of their mantles and their auburn hair look most beautiful against the gold ground which shines with dull light about them. Each of their aureoles bears a different pattern in raised *gesso*; a garland of flowers, a circle of human heads, suns, a tracery of roses and ivy, or yet again another of oak leaves. After Giotto's Allegories and the frescoes in San Martino, these saints are by far the loveliest things in San Francesco, and as they look towards us, ethereal, like a faint moon on a misty night, they seem the very incarnation of mediæval faith. Dante created women such as Matilda, who sings to him in Purgatory as she is picking flowers on a woodland river's edge, and Simone paints them and conveys their spirit in the faces of St. Clare and St. Elizabeth.

The Convent

It is natural to think that the Basilica and Convent built under the guidance of Elias was as we see it now in its full magnificence of chapels, porch, colonnades and cloisters. Certainly the essential form of the building has not been altered, but in the early days it stood isolated from the town, surrounded by such rocks as jut out among the grass in the ravine outside Porta S. Pietro, and approached by a drawbridge which made it resemble, even more than it does now, a

feudal stronghold guarding the Umbrian valley. Later on, as the life of the place centred ever more round the church of the saint, the citizens no longer built their houses near San Rufino or below the castle, but close to San Francesco, until a second town sprang up where once were only rough mountain pastures. It is still possible to form an idea of how it looked by following round the base of the hill by the Tescio, whence a wonderful and unique view of the northern side of church and convent is obtained (see Appendix). Assisi lies hidden, and standing high above us, shutting out the view of the valley, is San Francesco; not the building with great arches we are familiar with, rising high above the vineyards, but a castle, seen clearly defined and strong against the sky, whose bastions clasp the hill top as powerfully as a good rider bestrides his horse. Oak copses cover the slopes from the convent wall straight down to the banks of the Tescio, where little mills are set above deep pools of emerald green water and narrow canals fringed by poplar trees. The minute detail of the landscape in this deep ravine gives a curious feeling that we are walking in the background of one of Pier della Francesca's pictures—even to the distant view of low-lying hills where the torrent makes the sudden bend round the mountain edge; and the contrast is strange between it and the fortress-church upon the dark hill, where deep shadows lie across it and lurk within the crannies of its traceries in the bay windows of the chapels and in the depths of jutting stones. Such was the massive building "Jacopo" planned to stand upon the mountain ridge, as much a part of the rocks and the red earth as the cypresses which crown the summit. And in the midst, but on the southern side, he placed, as if to balance the rest, a square and boldly conceived bell-tower rising

SAN FRANCESCO FROM THE TESCIO

high above the church.[1] At the time it was the wonder of the Assisans, who boasted that for beauty as well as for solidity it could be counted among the first, not in Italy only, but in Europe. Bartolomeo of Pisa, came to cast one of the big bells, and together with his own name he inscribed those of Elias, Gregory IX, and Frederick II. On another bell, which has been recast, was graven a delightful couplet informing the faithful of the many services which consecrated bronze could render to the country round.

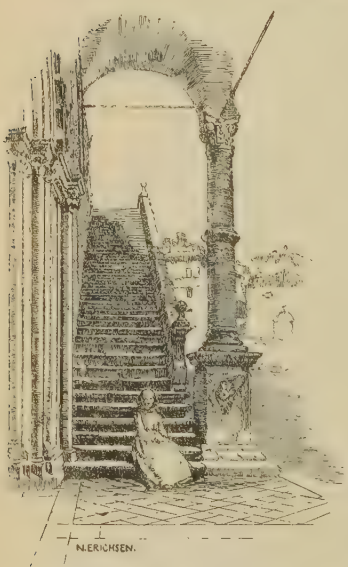
"Sabbatha pango, funera plango, fulgura frango:
Excito lentos, domo cruentos, dissipo ventos."
("I ring in Sunday, I lament for the dead, the lightning I break,
I hurry the sluggards, I vanquish the wicked, the winds I disperse.")

To the time of Elias also belongs the fine entrance to the Upper Church, where the Guelph lion and the eagle of Frederick II, record the liberality of both parties towards the building of the church, while the four animals round the wheel window seem to show that "Jacopo," notwithstanding his marked love for pure Gothic architecture, could not quite forget the strange but fascinating beasts of Lombard façades.

One friar in the fifteenth century inherited some of the enthusiasm of Elias for the basilica; this was Francesco Nani, the General of the franciscans, known as Francesco Sansone because his patron, Sixtus IV, is said to have addressed him with these words in allusion to his energy and strength of char-

[1] In 1529 the campanile, which rather gives the impression of a watch-tower, was used by Captain Bernardino da Sassoferrato, as a sure place of refuge when the Prince of Orange entered Assisi with his victorious army. From its heights he kept his enemy at bay for three days, and finally escaped to Spello leaving the city a prey to another despot.

acter, "Tu es fortissimus Samson." His name is found upon the beautiful stalls of the Upper Church, and it was he who superintended the laying out of the upper piazza, connected with the lower one by a long flight of stairs. It may also have been at this time that the *loggie* of San Francesco were built for the purpose of erecting booths during the festival of the "Pardon of St. Francis." Certainly it was chiefly at his expense that Baccio Pintelli (1478) built the handsome entrance door and porch to the Lower Church, which in olden times was entered by a small door close to the campanile. The architect fitted his work admirably into a corner of the building, completing with clustered columns of pink marble, wheel window, trefoiled arches and stone traceries, the scheme of colour and the perfect proportions for which San Francesco is so remarkable. The doors of carved wood, darkened now and of such massive workmanship as to resemble bronze, were made in 1546 by Niccolò da Gubbio, who has carefully commemorated the legend of St. Francis and the wolf of Gubbio in one of the panels to the left. Sansone also commissioned the



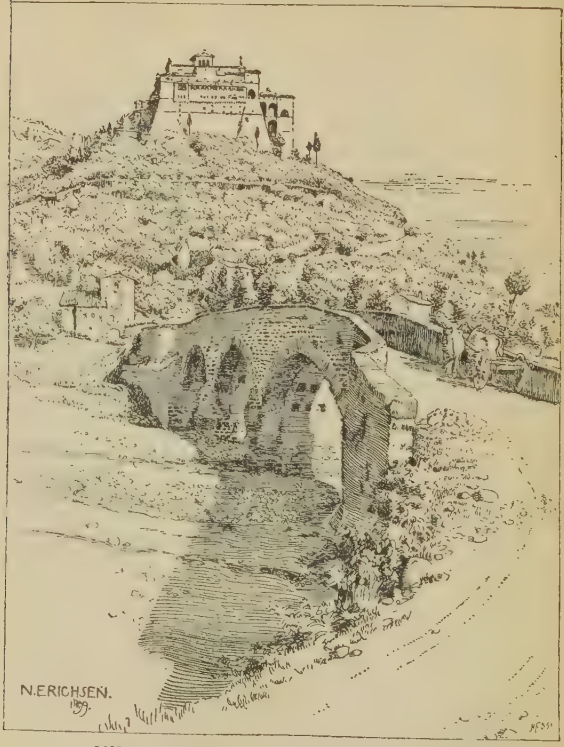
STAIRCASE LEADING FROM THE UPPER TO THE LOWER PIAZZA OF SAN FRANCESCO

doorway of what is now the entrance to the friars' convent a year after the porch was finished, then it was only a small chapel, built by the members of the Third order when St. Bernardine of Siena revived the religious enthusiasm of the people. The Assisan artist placed a bas-relief of the saint in the arch above the door, and it is still called "la porta di San Bernardino."

None should leave Assisi, not even those who only hurry over for the day, without visiting the convent, which recalls an eastern building from the whiteness of its great vaulted rooms, long corridors and arcaded courtyards when seen against the bluest of summer skies.[1] Then from the cool and spacious convent, a place to linger in upon a hot day in August, we step out into the open colonnade which skirts the building to the south, makes a sharp turn west, and then juts out at the end, facing south again. This last portion was added by Cardinal Albornoz in 1368, and goes by the name of the *Calcio*. But two centuries later the foundations were found to be insecure, and Sixtus IV, strengthened it by a bastion, which looks solid enough to resist even the havoc of an earthquake. The Pope was a great benefactor of the convent, and the friars placed his statue in a niche in the bastion, where he sits, his hand raised in benediction, on a papal throne overlooking the valley. From the rounded arches of rough stone, turned by storm and sunshine to russet-red, pink and yellow, we look out upon one of the most beautiful and extensive views in Umbria. To the right is Perugia standing out almost aggressively on the hill top; opposite, on a separate spur which divides the valley of Spoleto from that of the Tiber, Bettona and Montefalco hang upon peaks like the nests of birds in trees, and beyond are Spoleto, Trevi and Narni,

[1] Open to visitors at two o'clock.

nearer again Spello, and the domes of Foligno in the plain, with a host of small villages near. All the



SAN FRANCESCO FROM THE PONTE S. VITTORINO

Umbrian world lies before us from the convent of San Francesco.

Many weary people besides the popes came to rest

here in early times, and one mediæval warrior, Count Guido of Montefeltro, the great leader of the Ghibellines, laid down his arms and left his castle at Urbino in the year 1296, to pass his last days as a friar doing penance within the peaceful shelter of San Francesco for a long life of intrigue and bloodshed. He prayed by day, for at night they say he stood gazing out of his window, one of those we see above the walled orchard of the monks, watching the stars and attempting to divine the mysteries and destinies he read there, exceeding even the superstition of the age by his faith in the laws of astrology. But his meditations and careful preparation for a holy death were suddenly disturbed, and he found himself once more plunged into the whirl of Italian politics and intrigue. War raged between Pope Boniface VIII, a Gaetani, and the powerful family of the Colonna who braved his excommunications, and, when their Roman palaces were burnt, fled to their strongholds in the country. Many of these fell into the hands of the papal troops, but Penestrino, their principal fief, resisted all attacks and the Pope was nearly defeated when, remembering the old soldier Count Guido known to be "more cunning than any Italian of his time, masterly alike in war and in diplomacy," he hastened to ask his counsel. The story is recounted by Dante, who could not forgive the Ghibelline chieftain for coming to the assistance of the Pope.

Boniface, seeking to silence the scruples of the friar, promised to absolve him from all sin, even before committal, if only he would tell him how to act so "that Penestrino cumber earth no more." Guido, whose subtlety had not deserted him in the cloister, gave an answer which, while it ensured success to the papal arms, stamped him as a man of such deceit and treachery that Dante placed him in the eighth gulf of hell, among

the evil counsellors eternally surrounded by flaming tongues of fire.

> "Then, yielding to the forced arguments,
> Of silence as more perilous I deem'd,
> And answer'd: 'Father! since thou washest me
> 'Clear of that guilt wherein I now must fall,
> 'Large promise with performance scant, be sure
> 'Shall make thee triumph in thy lofty seat.'"[1]

Besides Count Guido and the popes who, finding the large and airy rooms of the convent a convenient summer resort, were constant visitors at Assisi, it can show a fine list of royal visitors. Among them is the Queen of Sweden who, in 1655, came escorted by Papal Nuncios, foreign ambassadors and cavalry, to pray at the tomb of St. Francis. The Assisans sent out their best carriages with horses ridden by postillions to meet her, adorned their palaces with flags and damask hangings, and rang all the bells as she approached the Basilica. "The Queen is called Christina," a chronicler tells us; "she is aged twenty-nine, is very learned, being able to write in eleven languages; she is small but very comely. . . . One hundred and fifty beds were prepared in the convent and beautiful it was to see the numerous suite and the pages of the nobles."

. . . . . .

It strikes the visitor to Assisi as strange that the black-robed friars in charge of the Basilica are so unlike the franciscans with whom everyone is familiar, and it may be well to give a few facts relating to the many divisions in the Order which, as we have seen, began already to change in the time of Elias. In 1517 a portion of the brethren, desiring a mitigation of their rule, obtained from Leo X, a dispensation and received the title of Friars Minor

[1] Cary's translation. Dante, *Inferno*, canto xxvii.

A FRIAR OF THE MINOR CONVENTUAL ORDER OF ST. FRANCIS

Conventuals with the permission to choose their own Minister General. Their dress is shown in the illustration. Those who kept to the rule more nearly approaching to that of St. Francis, like those of Sta. Maria degli Angeli, the Carceri and San Damiano, were called Friars Minor of the Observance, or Observants, and take precedence over the others, enjoying the privilege of electing the "Minister General of the whole order of the Friars Minor and successor of St. Francis." In 1528, Matteo Baschi, an observant, instituted a new branch called the Capucins, because of their long pointed capuce, whom he inspired with the desire to lead a hermit's life in solitary places, preaching to the people but once in the year. They have deserted their hermitages and are a very popular order in Italy, devoting themselves especially to preaching and hearing confessions, and form quite a distinct family from the rest. The Basilica at Assisi no longer belongs to the Conventuals, as after the union of Italy it was declared to be a national monument. The Government also took possession of the convent as a school for boys, leaving only a small portion for the reduced number of friars to inhabit. They went to law, and the judge pronounced the convent to be the property of the Holy See which had never ceased to exercise jurisdiction over it; but a proviso was made that the school was to remain in its present quarters until the Pope or the franciscans should erect a suitable building for it in another part of the town. As much money is required for so large an edifice and sites are not so easily procured, it seems probable that for many years the sound of boys at play will be heard in the convent walls instead of the slow footsteps of silent friars.

CHAPTER VIII

Giotto's Legend of St. Francis in the Upper Church

"What, therefore, Giotto gave to art was, before all things, vitality."—J. A. Symonds. *Renaissance in Italy.*

GIOTTO in the Lower Church had felt his way towards the full expression of his genius; succeeding so well in the four Allegories that he was chosen to illustrate the life of St. Francis, withheld, as we have seen, from all former artists, while Cimabue was to hear the poet's praise of his pupil, "Ora ha Giotto il grido." The task undertaken by the young painter, already a master at twenty-five, was almost superhuman, and certainly unique in the career of any artist; for whereas the pictorial treatment of the New Testament had been attempted by many during several centuries, Giotto was destined to invent forms for the whole franciscan cycle with such perfection that no succeeding artist has varied his formula. It remains a wonderful achievement, and the noble manner of its accomplishment proved him to be, as Mr Roger Fry expresses it, "the supreme epic painter of the world."

If St. Francis was fortunate in having his life related by so admirable a story-teller, Giotto also owed something to the early chroniclers who seeing, perhaps unconsciously, the extraordinary poetry and the dramatic incidents in the saint's career, had faithfully recorded them in simple and beautiful language. So far the

work was ready for Giotto, even the exact scenes were chosen for him to illustrate, but the problem how to unfold and make them familiar to the faithful by simple means, and yet not to lose the dignity and charm of the theme, remained for him to solve; and the representation, by a few figures, of a whole dramatic incident in so vivid a manner could only have succeeded in the hands of a great master of the fourteenth century. It is nearly certain that Giotto used St. Bonaventure's *Life of St. Francis*, finished in 1263 and founded, with but few additions, upon *The Three Companions* and Celano's first and second *Life of St. Francis*. Though written with a certain charm of style and though it lacks the ring of those early pages, in which St. Francis becomes known to us in such a way that we forget he lived seven hundred years ago; and although the various incidents of his life are presented like so many beautiful pictures, there is the feeling always that St. Bonaventure was writing about a saint already honoured upon earth and in heaven, and not of the man whom all loved as the "Poverello d'Assisi." But this legend served Giotto's purpose; and a knowledge of the words he followed being necessary in order to see where he simply kept to the franciscan legend, and where he penetrated the true spirit of the saint's life and its dramatic interest, we quote from it at some length, although many of the main facts have already been treated of in a preceding chapter.[1]

1. *St. Francis honoured by the Simpleton.*—(We begin on the right wall by the High Altar, and follow straight

[1] St. Bonaventure was born in 1221 at Bagnora in Umbria, and became General of the franciscan order. Dante, in canto xii. of the *Paradiso*, leaves him to sing the praises of St. Dominic, just as the dominican divine St. Thomas Aquinas had related the story of St. Francis in the preceding canto.

on to the opposite side, the legend unfolding as in the pages of a book.)

"A certain man of great simplicity dwelt in those days in Assisi, who, by virtue of knowledge divinely infused, whenever he met Francis in the street, would take off his mantle, and spread it upon the ground before him, declaring that he did so because he was a man worthy of all honour and reverence, who should shortly perform great works and marvellous deeds. . . ."[1]

The bare facts are here narrated which Giotto does not alter, but he puts such life into the scene that we feel he might have been present when the simpleton cast himself at Francis' feet and astonished the Assisans by his words. Attention is fixed upon the six people in the foreground. Two worthy citizens have just arrived in time to see the cloak being spread on the ground before Francis, and to hear the prophetic words; and as they turn to each other, one pointing to the scene, the other raising his hand with a movement of surprise, we seem to hear their carping criticisms upon the brilliant youth who, although he spent his time in singing and carousals, was one day to bring renown to their city. The young Francis, ever heedless of worldly comment, is stepping lightly on to the cloak, with a movement of surprise that he should receive such honour. All have the Florentine headgear, but the head of St. Francis is covered by a small white cap fitting close behind the ears, just showing his hair in front, and we feel that Giotto would have left him so, but the franciscans, ever to and fro in the church to see that the story was painted as they liked, insisted upon an aureole being added. As much glory for St. Francis they cried, as gold and money can give him. So Giotto, who disliked unnecessary decorations, was made to put an aureole above the white

[1] We have used Miss Lockhart's translation of St. Bonaventure's *Legenda Santa Francisci*.

cap, larger than any we have ever seen. But take away the halo and we should yet know which of the figures is the saint, for he stands a little apart from his two noble friends with ermine lined cloaks who talk with hands clasped together, and is perhaps already wondering about the destiny which awaits him and of which he was unaware, "for as yet he understood not the great purposes of God towards him."

Besides the human interest of the frescoes it is a delightful task to study the architecture in each scene, for here, in the Upper Church, Giotto has built a whole city of little pink houses with balconies, towers and turrets, of exquisite Gothic basilicas, of temples and gabled thrones. His priests sit within palaces full of lancet windows and pointed arches, the groined roofs, as in the Assisan Church, ablaze with myriads of stars. What love he had for dainty ornaments, simple, nay almost severe in outline, but perfectly finished; and he always likes to show the blue sky overhead, or at least peeping through one of the windows, making the marble seem more lustrous and creamy white. Would that all Florence had been built by him.

2. *St. Francis giving his cloak to a poor Knight.*

"Going forth one day, as was his wont, in apparel suited to his state, he met a certain soldier of honour and courage, but poor and vilely clad; of whose poverty, feeling a tender and sorrowful compassion, he took off his new clothes and gave them to the poor man-at-arms."

None are there to witness the kind action of the young saint who, like another St. Martin, has dismounted to give his mantle to the poor man in a ravine near a little town enclosed by walls, a church spire rising upon the opposite hill. Giotto must have been thinking of the small rock-set towns, with stunted trees growing outside their walls, in his Tuscan home in the Mugello when he painted this, instead

of the Umbrian town, standing amid vineyards and cornfields above an open valley with winding rivers, whose church he was decorating. It is the only one of the series in which the landscape is an important part of the picture, in the others it is a mere accessory.

3. *The Vision of St. Francis.*

"On the following night, when he was asleep, the divine mercy showed him a spacious and beautiful palace filled with arms and military ensigns, all marked with the Cross of Christ to make known to him that his charitable deed done to the poor soldier for the love of the great King of heaven should receive an unspeakable reward."

It will be remembered that after this dream St. Francis started to join the army of Walter de Brienne, having wrongly interpreted the vision, which in reality symbolised the army he was eventually to lead in the service of the Pope (see p. 44). This is, perhaps, the least successful of the frescoes; probably the subject did not appeal strongly to the painter (he only seems to have enjoyed inventing the colonnaded palace with its trefoil windows) and also, as Mr Ruskin explains: "Giotto never succeeded, to the end of his days, in representing a figure lying down, and at ease. It is one of the most curious points in all his character. Just the thing which he could study from nature without the smallest hindrance, is the thing he never can paint; while subtleties of form and gesture, which depend absolutely on their momentariness, and actions in which no model can stay an instant, he seizes with infallible accuracy."[1]

4. *St. Francis praying before the Crucifix in San Damiano.*

"As he lay prostrate before a crucifix he was filled with great spiritual consolation, and gazing with tearful eyes upon

[1] J. Ruskin, *Mornings in Florence*, iii. Before the Soldan.

ST. FRANCIS RENOUNCES THE WORLD

(D. ANDERSON—*photo*)

the holy cross of the Lord, he heard with his bodily ears a voice from the crucifix, which said thrice to him: 'Francis, go and build up My house, which as thou seest, is falling into ruin.'"

Unfortunately this fresco is much faded and in parts peeled off; this, combined with the representation of a ruined church, gives a curious effect of total destruction, as if an earthquake had passed over the land. The figure of the saint, just visible, and his attitude of earnest prayer is very charming.

5. *St. Francis renounces the world.*

"And now his father, . . . brought this son, . . . before the Bishop of Assisi to compel him to renounce in his hands all his inheritance. . . . As soon, therefore, as he came into the Bishop's presence, without a moment's delay, neither waiting for his father's demand nor uttering a word himself, he laid aside all his clothes, and gave them back to his father. . . . With marvellous fervour he then turned to his father, and spoke thus to him in the presence of all: 'Until this hour I have called thee my father on earth; from henceforth, I may say confidently, my Father Who art in heaven.'"

This, perhaps the most interesting of Giotto's frescoes, can be compared with the one in Sta. Croce at Florence on the same subject, painted when time and labour had given greater strength to his genius. The Assisan scene is treated with more simplicity, and, if less perfect as a decorative scheme, possesses quite as much dramatic interest and vitality. A little block of pink houses on either side reminds us that we are outside the Bishop's palace in the Piazza S. Maria Maggiore, where the scene is said to have occurred. Of course all the Assisans have turned out to see how the quarrel between Bernardone and his son will end. They stand behind the irate father like a Greek chorus, while one, evidently a citizen of distinction from his ermine lined cloak and tippet, restrains Messer Pietro, who is throwing back his arm

with the evident intention of striking his son. Francis' passion for repairing Assisan churches and ministering to the wants of the poor had proved a costly business to the thrifty merchant, who loved his money and had little sympathy with Assisan beggars (sojourners in Assisi may agree with him). Delightful are the two tiny children who with one hand clutch up their garments, full of stones to throw at St. Francis. The bishop is the calmest person there, turning to his priests he seems to say: "All is well, there is God the Father's hand in the sky (with a little patience it can be distinguished in the fresco), and we are sure to gain the day, spite of Pietro's angry words." And so he quietly folds his episcopal mantle around St. Francis, who from this moment becomes indeed the Child of heaven. It may seem strange, as Mr Ruskin truly observes, that St. Francis, one of whose virtues was obedience, should begin life by disobeying his father, but Giotto means to show that the young saint was casting off all worldly restraint in order to obey the Supreme Power, and the scene is a counterpart to Dante's lines referring to his marriage with the Lady Poverty.

> "A dame, to whom none openeth pleasure's gate
> More than to death, was, 'gainst his father's will,
> His stripling choice: and he did make her his,
> Before the spiritual court, by nuptial bonds,
> And in his father's sight: from day to day,
> Then loved her more devoutly."[1]

6. *The dream of Innocent III.*

"He saw in a dream the Lateran Basilica, now falling into ruin, supported by the shoulders of a poor, despised, and feeble man. 'Truly,' said he, 'this is he who by his works and his teaching shall sustain the Church of Christ.'"

In the representations of this vision painted for

[1] xi. *Paradiso*, Cary's translation.

Dominican churches, the Lateran is always supported by the two great founders, Francis and Dominic, who, in their different ways, helped Innocent in his difficult task of reforming the Church. Giotto shows his power and the advance art is making under his hand, in the figure of St. Francis, who with body slightly bent back and one hand on his hip, seems to support the great weight, while his feet are so firmly planted that there is no uncomfortable feeling of strain and only a sense of strength and security. Two men are seated by the bedside of the Pope, one is asleep while the other keeps watch, and in his slightly wearied attitude and the reposeful figure of the sleeper, Giotto's keen observation of the ordinary incidents of every day life is very apparent.

7. *Innocent III, sanctions the Rule of St. Francis.*

"He was filled with a great and special devotion and love for the servant of God. He granted all his petitions, and promised to grant him still greater things. He approved the Rule, gave him a mission to preach penance, and granted to all the lay brothers in the company of the servant of God to wear a tonsure smaller than that worn by priests, and freely to preach the Word of God."

Giotto, in his fresco, has to represent the most important event in the life of the saint—his arrival at the papal court when he comes face to face with one of the greatest of the Roman Pontiffs; and by the simplest possible means the scene is brought before us. Here are no crimson-robed cardinals, no gilded papal throne; the bishops grouped behind Innocent are hardly noticed, or even the brethren who, with hands clasped as though in prayer, press closely to their leader like a flock of sheep round their shepherd. The eye is so fixed upon the two central figures, that all else fades away. Giotto has seized the supreme moment when the Pope, having overcome his fear lest St. Francis should falter

in a life of poverty and prove to be only another heretical leader of which Italy had already too many, is, with kingly gesture, giving the Umbrian penitent authority to preach throughout the land. St. Francis, holding out his hand to receive his simple Rule, now bearing the papal seals, looks up with steady gaze; he is the most humble among men kneeling at the feet of Rome's sovereign, but strong in love, in faith and in knowledge of the righteousness of his mission. M. Paul Sabatier has beautifully illustrated the meaning of Giotto when he writes: "On pourrait croire que le peintre avait trempé ses lèvres dans la coupe du Voyant Calabrais [Joachim de Flore] et qu'il a voulu symboliser dans l'attitude de ces deux hommes la rencontre des représentants de deux âges de l'humanité, celui de la Loi et celui de l'Amour."

8. *Vision of the Friars at Rivo-Torto.*

"Now while the brethren abode in the place aforesaid, the holy man went on a certain Saturday into the city of Assisi, for he was to preach on the Sunday morning in the Cathedral Church. And being thus absent in body from his children, and engaged in devout prayer to God (as was his custom throughout the night), in a certain hut in the canon's garden, about midnight, whilst some of the brethren were asleep and others watching in prayer, a chariot of fire, of marvellous splendour. was seen to enter the door, and thrice to pass hither and thither through the house; . . . "

Giotto's was not a nature to find much enjoyment in the portrayal of such events as saints being carried aloft in fiery chariots, and in dealing with this miracle he dedicated all his power to representing the astonishment of the brethren who witness the vision at Rivo-Torto. Two talk together and point to St. Francis being borne across the heavens by crimson horses, one hastens to awaken his companions who are huddled together in their hut like tired dogs asleep, and another starts from his slumbers to hear the wondrous news.

9. *Vision of Brother Pacifico.*

"This friar being in company with the holy man, entered with him into a certain deserted church, and there, as he was praying fervently he fell into an ecstacy, and amid many thrones in heaven he saw one more glorious than all the rest, adorned with precious stones of most glorious brightness. And marvelling at the surpassing brightness of that throne, he began anxiously to consider within himself who should be found worthy to fill it. Then he heard a voice saying to him: 'This was the throne of one of the fallen angels, and now it is reserved for the humble Francis.'"

With what devotion St. Francis, his hands crossed upon his breast, prays upon the steps of the altar, while the friar behind is intent on asking questions about the marvellous thrones he sees poised above his head. Nothing can exceed the grace of the wide-winged angel floating down to earth to record the humility of Francis, his garments slightly spread by his movement through the air.

10. *St. Francis chases the Devils away from Arezzo.*

"In order to disperse these seditious powers of the air, he sent as his herald Brother Sylvester, a man simple as a dove, saying to him: 'Go to the gates of the city, and there in the Name of Almighty God command the demons by virtue of holy obedience, that without delay they depart from that place. . . .'"

The main facts of the legend are followed closely in this fresco, but St. Bonaventure does not tell us how the miracle was performed, while Giotto, understanding the soul of Francis, paints him kneeling outside the gates of Arezzo praying with intense fervour for the salvation of the city. His faith is so strong that he does not even look up like Brother Sylvester, to see the demons flee away; some springing from off the chimneys, others circling above the towers, their bat-like wings outspread. The figure of Brother Sylvester is very fine, and the way he is lifting his tunic and

stepping forward, as he stretches out one arm with a gesture of command towards the demons, could not be rendered with more ease and truth.

11. *St. Francis and Brother Illuminatus before the Sultan of Egypt.*

"When they had gone a little further, they met with a band of Saracens, who, quickly falling upon them, like wolves upon a flock of sheep, cruelly seized and bound the servants of God . . . having in many ways afflicted and oppressed them, they were . . . according to the holy man's desire, brought into the presence of the Sultan. And being questioned by that prince whence and for what purpose they had come . . . the servant of Christ, being enlightened from on high, answered him thus: 'If thou and thy people will be converted to Christ I will willingly abide with thee. But if thou art doubtful whether or not to forsake the law of Mohamed for the faith of Christ, command a great fire to be lighted, and I will go into it with thy priests, that it may be known which faith should be held to be the most certain and the most holy.' To whom the Sultan made answer: 'I do not believe that any of my priests would be willing to expose himself to the fire or to endure any manner of torment in defence of his faith.' Then said the holy man: 'If thou wilt promise me for thyself and thy people that thou wilt embrace the worship of Christ if I come forth unharmed, I will enter the fire alone.' . . . But the Sultan answered that he dared not accept this challenge, because he feared a sedition of the people."

This subject, from its dramatic interest, appealed to Giotto, giving full scope to his powers, both as a story-teller, and as a painter with such genius for portraying dignity and nobility of character. The principal persons, the Sultan and St. Francis, are here clearly placed before us as Giotto wished us to conceive them, and how correctly he realised their characters we learn from the chronicles of the time. "We saw," writes Jacques de Vitry in one of his letters, "Brother Francis arrive, who is the founder of the Minorite Order; he was a simple man, without letters, but very lovable and dear to God as well as to men. He came while

the army of the Crusaders was under Damietta, and was much respected by all." This is indeed the man depicted by Giotto in the slight figure of the preacher standing at the foot of the marble throne, so humble, yet full of that secret power which won even the Sultan's admiration. But though the story centres in St. Francis, the person Giotto wishes all to notice is the Sultan, who, far from being an ignorant heathen to be converted, conveys the idea of a most noble and kingly person, Malek Camel in short, known throughout the East as the "Perfect Prince." His mollahs had wished to kill St. Francis and his companion, and the fine answer he made was worthy of his high character. "Seigneurs," he said, addressing his visitors, "they have commanded me by Mahomet and by the law to have your heads cut off. For thus the law commands; but I will go against the order, or else I should render you bad guerdon for having risked death to save my soul."

Giotto has chosen the most dramatic moment when St. Francis offers to go through the ordeal by fire with the mahommedan priests, to prove the power of the Christian God. With one look back upon the fire the mollahs gather their robes around them and hurriedly leave the Sultan's presence; St. Francis points towards the flames as though he were assuring the Sultan that they will not hurt him, while the friar behind gazes contemptuously after the retreating figures of the mollahs.

Dante and Milton in their different ways were able to give us a vivid idea of fire, flame and heat, and so would Giotto have done had he expressed his ideas by words instead of in painting; but he was wise enough not to attempt it in his fresco, and so in lieu of a blaze of crimson flames we have only what looks like a stunted red cypress, realistic enough to make us under-

stand the story without drawing our attention away from the main interest of the scene. In this fresco we are again reminded of the simple methods, grand and impressive by their very straightforwardness, by which he brings before us so strange a scene and accentuates the importance of an event in his own individual way.

12. *Ecstasy of St. Francis.*

This legend is not recounted by St. Bonaventure, Celano, or in *The Three Companions*, but there is a tradition of how St. Francis one day in divine communion with God, was wrapt in ecstasy and his companions saw him raised from the ground in a cloud. All that is human in the scene Giotto has done as well as possible, but he evidently found it hard to realise how St. Francis would have looked rising up in a cloud, so he has devoted himself to rendering truthfully the astonishment of the disciples who witness the miracle.

13. *The Institution of the Feast at Greccio.*

" . . in order to excite the inhabitants of Greccio to commemorate the nativity of the Infant Jesus with great devotion, he determined to keep it with all possible solemnity; and lest he should be accused of lightness or novelty, he asked and obtained the permission of the sovereign Pontiff. Then he prepared a manger, and brought hay, an ox and an ass to the place appointed. The brethren were summoned, the people ran together, the forest resounded with their voices, and that venerable night was made glorious by many brilliant lights and sonorous psalms of praise. The man of God stood before the manger, full of devotion and piety, bathed in tears and radiant with joy; many masses were said before it, and the Holy Gospel was chanted by Francis, the Levite of Christ. . . . A certain valiant and veracious soldier, Master John of Greccio, who, for the love of Christ, had left the warfare of this world, and become a dear friend of the holy man, affirmed that he beheld an Infant marvellously beautiful sleeping in that manger, whom the blessed Father Francis embraced with both his arms, as if he would awake him from sleep."

Besides the wonderful way in which Giotto has succeeded, to use the words of Mr Roger Fry, "in making visible, as it were, the sudden thrill which penetrates an assembly at a moment of supreme significance," there is the further interest of knowing that the scene of the Nativity arranged by St. Francis at Greccio, was the first of the mystery plays represented in Italy which were the beginning of the Italian drama. Giotto makes not only Master John of Greccio see the miracle of the Holy Child lying in the saint's arms and smiling up into his face, but also those who accompany him and some of the friars, while the other brethren, singing with mouths wide open like young birds awaiting their food, are much too occupied to notice what passes around them. A group of women, their heads swathed in white veils, are entering at the door, and the whole scene is one of animation and festivity. The marble canopy, with tall marble columns and gabled towers, over the altar is one of Giotto's most exquisite and graceful designs. But Giotto the shepherd has not succeeded so happily in depicting an ox which lies at the saint's feet like a purring cat.

14. *The Miracle of the Water.*

"Another time, when the man of God wished to go to a certain desert place, that he might give himself the more freely to contemplation, being very weak, he rode upon an ass belonging to a poor man. It being a hot summer's day, the poor man, as he followed the servant of Christ, became weary with the long way and the steep ascent, and beginning to faint with fatigue and burning thirst, he called after the saint: 'Behold,' he said, 'I shall die of thirst unless I can find a little water at once to refresh me.' Then without delay the man of God got off the ass, and kneeling down with his hands stretched out to heaven, he ceased not to pray till he knew he was heard."

Giotto has here rendered the aridity of the summit of La Vernia, its pinnacles of rocks with stunted trees.

Two friars, by now quite accustomed to miracles, converse together as they lead the donkey from which St. Francis has dismounted to pray that the thirsty man's wishes may be gratified. The grouping of the figures repeat the pointed lines of the landscape, and the whole is harmonious and of great charm of composition. It was justly admired by Vasari, who thought the peasant drinking was worthy of "perpetual praise." Florentine writers were continually harping on what they considered to be Giotto's claim to immortality, his genius for portraying nature so that his copy seemed as real as life, an opinion shared by Vasari when he gives his reason for admiring this particular fresco. "The eager desire," he says, "with which the man bends down to the water is portrayed with such marvellous effect, that one could almost believe him to be a living man actually drinking."

Over the door is a medallion of the Madonna and Child which once was by Giotto, but now, alas, the eyes of faith must see his handiwork through several layers of paint with which restorers have been allowed to cover it. A slightly sardonic smile has been added to the Madonna, and to appreciate what is left of her charm it is necessary to look at her from the other end of the church, where the beauty of line and composition can still be discerned notwithstanding the barbarous treatment she has undergone.

15. *St. Francis Preaching to the Birds at Bevagna.*

"When he drew near to Bevagna, he came to a place where a great multitude of birds of different kinds were assembled together, which, when they saw the holy man, came swiftly to the place, and saluted him as if they had the use of reason. They all turned towards him and welcomed him; those which were on the trees bowed their heads in an unaccustomed manner, and all looked earnestly at him, until he went to them and seriously admonished them to listen to the Word of the Lord. . . . While he spoke these and other

such words to them, the birds rejoiced in a marvellous manner, swelling their throats, spreading their wings, opening their beaks, and looking at him with great attention."

This theme has been treated by another artist in the Lower Church, with little success as we have seen; it is also sometimes introduced in the predellas of big pictures of the school of Cimabue; but it remained for Giotto to give us a picture as beautiful in colour as those left by the early chroniclers in words. He never painted it again on a large scale, and the small representation in the predella of the picture in the Louvre follows the Assisan fresco in every detail. Two friars whose brown habits are tinted with mauve, one tree, a blue, uncertain landscape and some dozen birds, are all he thought necessary to explain the story, and yet the whole poetry of St. Francis' life is here, the keynote of his character, which has made him the most beloved among saints, and the man who though poor, unlettered and often reviled, was to herald the coming of a new age in religion, art and literature. With what love he bends towards his little feathered brethren as he beckons them to him, and they gather fearlessly round him while he points to the skies and tells them in simple words their duties towards their Creator.

Another Florentine, Benozzo Gozzoli, painted this subject; there across the Assisan valley at Montefalco we can see it. His birds are certainly better drawn, there are more of them too, and we can even amuse ourselves by distinguishing among them golden orioles, blackbirds, doves and wood pigeons, but no one would hesitate to say that real charm and poetry are missing. Giotto's fresco, painted 600 years ago, is somewhat faded and many of the birds are partly effaced, but we do not feel it matters

much what they are—we only love the fact that St. Francis called the Umbrian birds around him and preached them a sermon with the same care as if he had been in the presence of a pope, and that Giotto believed the legend and took pains with his work, intending that we also should believe and understand something of the sweetness of this Umbrian scene.

16. *Death of the Knight of Celano.*

"When the holy man came into the soldier's house all the family rejoiced greatly to receive this poor one of the Lord. And before he began to eat, according to his custom, the holy man offered his usual prayers and praises to God, with his eyes raised to heaven. When he had finished his prayer, he familiarly called his kind host aside, and said to him: 'Behold, my host and brother, in compliance with thy prayers I have come to eat in thy house. But now attend to that which I say to thee, for thou shalt eat no more here, but elsewhere. Therefore, confess thy sins with truly penitent contrition; let nothing remain in thee unrevealed by true confession, for the Lord will requite thee to-day for the kindness with which thou hast received His poor servant.' The good man believed these holy words, and disclosing all his sins in confession to the companion of St. Francis, he set all his house in order, making himself ready for death, and preparing himself for it to the best of his power. They then sat down to table, and the others began to eat, but the spirit of the host immediately departed, according to the words of the man of God, which foretold his sudden death."

This is one of the most characteristic of Giotto's works, showing his power, unique at that time, of touching upon human sorrow with simplicity, truth and restraint. Here is no exaggerated gesture of grief, no feigned expression of surprise or false note to make us doubt the truth of the tragedy that has befallen the house of Celano. But the movement of the crowd of sorrowing people, the men gazing down on the dead knight, the women weeping, their

DEATH OF THE KNIGHT OF CELANO

(D. ANDERSON—*photo*)

fair hair falling about their shoulders, tell better than any restless movement the awful grief which fills their hearts. It has happened so suddenly that the friar still sits at table with his fork in his hand, while St. Francis hast just risen to go to the people's assistance, while a man in the Florentine dress turns to him seeming, from the gesture of his hand, to say: "See, your prophecy has been fulfilled but too soon."

17. *St. Francis preaches before Honorius III.*

"Having to preach on a certain day before the Pope and the cardinals, at the suggestion of the Cardinal of Ostia he learned a sermon by heart, which he had carefully prepared; when he was about to speak it for their edification he wholly forgot everything he had to say, so that he could not utter a word. He related with true humility what had befallen him, and then, having invoked the aid of the Holy Spirit, he began at once to move the hearts of these great men. . . ."

In this fine fresco Giotto has represented St. Francis holding his audience as though spell-bound by the power of his eloquence, and the contrast is great between the charming figure of the saint and that of the stern and earnest Pope, who, deep in thought, is leaning his chin on his hand, perhaps wondering at the strange chance which has brought the slight brown figure, so dusty and so poorly clad, so ethereal and so eloquent, into the midst of the papal court. It is delightful to study the faces and gestures of the listeners; some are all enthusiasm and interest, like the charming young cardinal in an orange-tinted robe, whose thoughts seem to be far away following where St. Francis' burning words are leading them; but the older man gazes critically at the saint, perhaps saying within himself: "What is this I hear, we must give up all, our fat benefices, our comfortable Roman palaces, to follow Christ"; and the cardinal on the right of the Pope also seems surprised at the new

doctrines of love, poverty and sacrifice. Four others lean their heads on their hands; but how varied are the gestures, from the Pope, all eagerness and keen attention, to the cardinal bowing his head sadly thinking, like the man of great possessions, how pleasant it would be to become perfect, but how impossible it is to leave the goods of this world. St. Francis' companion is seated at his master's feet as though affirming, "I follow his teaching, and all he says is right."

18. *The Apparition of St. Francis.*

"For when the illustrious preacher and glorious Confessor, Anthony, who is now with Christ, was preaching to the brethren in the chapel at Arles on the title upon the Cross —'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews'—a certain friar of approved virtue named Monaldus, casting his eyes by divine inspiration upon the door of the chapter-house, beheld, with his bodily eyes, the blessed Francis raised in the air, blessing the brethren, with his arms outstretched in the form of a Cross."

The friars sit in various attitudes of somewhat fatigued attention before St. Anthony who is standing, and none seem as yet to be aware of the apparition of St. Francis, who appears at the open door under a Gothic archway, the blue sky behind him. There is a strange feeling of peace about the scene.

19. *The Stigmata.*

". . . On the hard rock,
'Twixt Arno and the Tiber, he from Christ
Took the last signet, which his limbs two years
Did carry. . . ."[1]

This fresco is unhappily much ruined; enough however remains to trace a close resemblance to Giotto's predella of the same subject now in the Louvre, but where the solemnity of the scene is increased by the saint being alone with the Seraph upon La Vernia.

. . . . . .

[1] Dante, *Paradiso*, xi., Cary's translation.

It may be well here to give some of the various opinions as to the authorship of these frescoes, though in this small book it is impossible to go at all deeply into the subject. Some, following Baron von Rumohr, hold that the only paintings in the Upper Church by Giotto, are the two by the door, the *Miracle of the Water* and the *Sermon to the Birds*, while Messrs. Crowe and Cavalcaselle give also the first of the series and the last five to him, but while "youthful and feeling his way," and all the rest to Gaddo Gaddi, or maybe Filippo Rusutti. Lastly, Mr Bernhard Berenson is of opinion that Giotto's style is to be clearly traced from the first fresco, *St. Francis honoured by the Simpleton*, to the nineteenth, *The Stigmata*; and they show so much affinity to the work of the great Florentine in Sta. Croce and elsewhere, that it is impossible not to agree with him. In the remaining frescoes, representing the death and miracles of St. Francis, he sees a close resemblance to the work of the artist who painted in the chapel of St. Nicholas (Lower Church), and who may have aided Giotto in the Upper Church before being chosen to continue his master's work.

20. *Death of St. Francis.*

"The hour of his departure being at hand, he commanded all the brethren who were in that place to be called to him, and comforted them with consoling words concerning his death, exhorting them with fatherly affection to the divine love. . . . When he had finished these loving admonitions, this man, most dear to God, commanded that the Book of the Gospels should be brought to him, and . . . his most holy soul being set free and absorbed in the abyss of the divine glory, the blessed man slept in the Lord."

This fresco has suffered from the damp and all that clearly remains are the angels, in whom the artist's feeling for graceful movement is shown, their flight down towards the dead recalling the rush of the

swallows' wings as they circle in the evening above the towers of San Francesco.

21. *The Apparitions of St. Francis.*

" . . . Brother Augustine, a holy and just man, was minister of the Friars at Lavoro: he being at the point of death, and having for a long time lost the use of speech, exclaimed suddenly, in the hearing of all who stood around: 'Wait for me, Father, wait for me; I am coming with thee. . . .'

" At the same time the Bishop of Assisi was making a devout pilgrimage to the church of St. Michael, on Mount Gargano. To him the Blessed Francis appeared on the very night of his departure, saying: 'Behold I leave the world and go to Heaven.'"

In one fresco the artist has represented two different scenes, the greater prominence being given to the dying friar surrounded by many brethren. In neither is shown the figure of St. Francis, as the artist probably thought that it would have been difficult to introduce the apparition twice. But while the gesture of the friar stretching out his arms and the arrangement of the others explain the story, it would be difficult, without St. Bonaventure's legend, to know the feelings of the bishop who is so calmly sleeping in the background.

22. *The Incredulous Knight of Assisi.*

" . . . when the holy man had departed from this life, and his sacred spirit had entered its eternal house . . . many of the citizens of Assisi were admitted to see and kiss the Sacred Stigmata. Among these was a certain soldier, a learned and prudent man, named Jerome, held in high estimation in the city, who, doubting the miracle of the Sacred Stigmata, and being incredulous like another Thomas, more boldly and eagerly than the rest moved the nails in the presence of his fellow-citizens, and touched with his own hands the hands and feet of the holy man; and while he thus touched these palpable signs of the wounds of Christ, his heart was healed and freed from every wound of doubt."

This fresco is so much ruined that it is difficult to enjoy it as a whole, but some of the figures of the young acolytes bearing lighted torches, and the priests reading the service and sprinkling the body with holy water, are very life-like.

23. *The Mourning of the Nuns of San Damiano.*

"Passing by the church of St. Damian, where that noble virgin, Clare, now glorious in heaven, abode with the virgins her sisters, the holy body, adorned with celestial jewels [the marks of the Stigmata], remained there awhile, till those holy virgins could see and kiss them."

This, the loveliest of the last nine frescoes, recalls the one in St. Nicholas' Chapel of the three prisoners imploring the saint's protection; even to the basilica which forms the background of both. Considering that it is the last farewell of St. Clare and her companions to St. Francis the artist might have given a more tragic touch to the scene, but all is made subservient to the rendering of graceful figures, like the charming nuns who talk together as they hasten out of San Damiano, whose humble façade of stone the artist has transformed into a building of marble and mosaic almost rivalling the glories of such cathedrals as Siena and Orvieto. St. Clare stoops to kiss the saint while priests and citizens wait to resume their hymns of praise, and a small child climbs up a tree and tears down branches to strew upon the road in front of the bier.[1]

24. *The Canonisation of St. Francis.*

"The Sovereign Pontiff, Gregory IX, . . . determined with pious counsel and holy consideration to pay to the holy man that veneration and honour of which he knew him to

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[1] A comparison may be made between the long and slender body of the saint here with that in the death of St. Francis in Sta. Croce, where the body is firmly drawn and of more massive proportions.

be most worthy . . . and coming himself in person to the city of Assisi in the year of our Lord's Incarnation, 1228, on Sunday the 6th of July, with many ceremonies and great solemnity, he inscribed the Blessed Father in the catalogue of the saints."

This fresco is so ruined that it is impossible to form any idea of its composition; about the only object clearly to be seen is the sepulchral urn of St. Francis, represented beneath an iron grating in the church of San Giorgio.

25. *The Dream of Gregory IX, at Perugia.*

"On a certain night, then, as the Pontiff was afterwards wont to relate with many tears, the Blessed Francis appeared to him in a dream, and with unwonted severity in his countenance, reproving him for the doubt which lurked in his heart, raised his right arm, discovered the wound, and commanded that a vessel should be brought to receive the blood which issued from his side. The Supreme Pontiff still in vision, brought him the vessel, which seemed to be filled even to the brim with the blood which flowed from his side."

We are here left with an impression that the artist was hampered by not having enough figures for his composition, and the four men seated on the ground and guarding the Pope, compare unfavourably with Giotto's fresco of the three grand watchers by Innocent III, upon the opposite wall.

26. *St. Francis cures the Wounded Man.*

"It happened in the city of Ilerda, in Catalonia, that a good man, named John, who was very devout to St. Francis, had to pass through a street, in which certain men were lying in wait to kill him and . . . wounded him with so many dagger-strokes as to leave him without hope of life. . . . The poor man's cure was considered impossible by all the physicians. . . . And, behold, as the sufferer lay alone on his bed, frequently calling on the name of Francis . . . one stood by him in the habit of a Friar Minor, who, as it seemed to him, came in by a window, and calling him by

his name, said, 'Because thou hast trusted in me, behold, the Lord will deliver thee.'"

The artist having here an incident less difficult to deal with than visions and dreams, betrays a certain humour in the stout figure of the doctor, who, as he leaves the room, turns to the two women as though saying, "He has begun to pray, as if that can help him when I have failed to cure him." Meantime St. Francis, escorted by two tall and graceful angels with great wings, is laying his hands upon the wounded man. Here, as in most of these latter frescoes, a single scene is divided into more than one episode; this seems to us to be the great difference between them and the works of Giotto, where the eye is immediately attracted towards the principal figure or figures, the others only serving to complete the composition.

27. *The last Confession of the Woman of Benevento.*

". . . a certain woman who had a special devotion to St. Francis, went the way of all flesh. Now, all the clergy being assembled round the corpse to keep the accustomed vigils, and say the usual psalms and prayers, suddenly that woman rose on her feet, in presence of them all, on the bier where she lay, and calling to her one of the priests . . . 'Father,' she said, 'I wish to confess. As soon as I was dead, I was sent to a dreadful dungeon, because I had never confessed a certain sin which I will now make known to you. But St. Francis, whom I have ever devoutly served, having prayed for me, I have been suffered to return to the body, that having revealed that sin, I may be made worthy of eternal life.' . . . She made her confession, therefore, trembling to the priest, and having received absolution, quietly lay down on the bier, and slept peacefully in the Lord."

The legend is dramatic and the artist has not failed to make us feel the great sadness and solemnity of the scene. A moment more, and the group of people to the left will come forward to carry the woman away for burial while the relations weep most bitterly; they

stand aside with heads bowed in grief, for already the presence of death is felt. Only the sorrow of the child, who stretches out his arms, has passed away upon seeing her rise to speak with the priest. Very tall and slender are the figures of the women, bending and swaying together like flowers in a gentle breeze.

28. *St. Francis releases Peter of Alesia from Prison.*

"When Pope Gregory IX, was sitting in the chair of St. Peter, a certain man named Peter, of the city of Alesia, on an accusation of heresy, was carried to Rome, and, by command of the same Pontiff, was given in custody to the Bishop of Tivoli. He, having been charged to keep him in safety . . bound him with heavy chains and imprisoned him in a dark dungeon. . . . This man began to call with many prayers and tears upon St. Francis . . . beseeching him to have mercy upon him. . . . About twilight on the vigil of his feast, St. Francis mercifully appeared to him in prison, and, calling him by his name, commanded him immediately to arise. . . . Then, by the power of the presence of the holy man, he beheld the fetters fall broken from his feet, and the doors of the prison were unlocked without anyone to open them, so that he could go forth unbound and free."

Everything here gives the impression of height; the tall slim figures, the high doorway, and the slender tower and arches. St. Francis is seen flying up to the skies with the same swift motion the artist has given to the figure of St. Nicholas in the Lower Church, and the "Greek Chorus" to the left serves to show surprise at the unusual occurrence of a prisoner suddenly emerging from his prison with broken fetters in his hands.

. . . . . .

None should leave the church without looking at the stalls in the choir; they are by Domenico da San Severino, made in 1501, by order, as an inscription tells us, of Francesco Sansone, General of the fran-

ciscan order, and friend of Sixtus IV. The artist only took ten years to execute this really wonderful work; the intarsia figures of the stalls in pale yellow wood, most of them fancy portraits of the companions of St. Francis, are remarkable for their form and character. They betray, in the opinion of Mr Berenson, Venetian influences of Crivelli and of the school of the Vivarini.

ARMS OF THE FRANCISCANS FROM THE INTARSIA OF THE STALLS

CHAPTER IX

St. Clare at San Damiano. The Church of Santa Chiara

"Comme les fleurs, les âmes ont leur parfum qui ne trompe jamais."—P. SABATIER. *Vie de S. François d'Assise.*

THE days of St. Clare from the age of eighteen until her death in 1253 were passed within the convent walls of San Damiano, and though peaceful enough, for a mediæval lady, they were full of events and varied interest.

She was born on the 10th of July 1194 in Assisi of noble parents, her father being Count Favorino Scifi (spelt also Scefi) the descendant of an ancient Roman family who owned a large palace in the town, and a castle on the slope of Mount Subasio to the east of the ravine where the Carceri lie among the ilex woods. The castle gave the title of Count of Sasso Rosso to its owners, and was the cause of much skirmishing between the Scifi and the Ghislerio who were continually wresting it from each other, until in 1300, during one of these struggles, the walls were razed to the ground and no one sought afterwards to repair its ruins. Of Sasso Rosso a few stones still remain, which, as they catch the morning light, are seen from Assisi like a grey crag projecting from the mountain, high above the road to Spello. When not fighting beneath the walls of his castle Count Favorino was generally away on some skirmishing expedition, and during his absences,

his wife, the Lady Ortolana of the noble family of the Fiumi, would depart upon a pilgrimage to the south of Italy or even to the Holy Land.[1] An old writer remarks that her name "Ortolana (market gardener) was very appropriate, because from her, as from a well-tended orchard, sprang most noble plants." After her return from Palestine she one night heard a voice speaking these prophetic words to which she listened with great awe. "Be not afraid Ortolana, for from thee shall arise a light so bright and clear that the darkness of the earth shall be illuminated thereby." So the daughter who was born soon after was called Chiara in memory of the divine message. With so pious a mother it is not surprising that Clare should have grown up thoughtful and fond of praying; we even hear of her seeking solitary corners in the palace where she would be found saying her rosary, using pebbles like the hermits of old instead of beads upon a chain. But her evident inclination for a religious life in no way alarmed Count Favorino, who had made up his mind that she should marry a wealthy young Assisan noble, for even at an early age she showed great promise of beauty. "Her face was oval," says a chronicler, "her forehead spacious, her complexion brilliant, and her eyebrows and hair very fair. A celestial smile played in her eyes and around her mouth; her nose was well-proportioned and slightly aquiline; of good stature she was rather inclined to stoutness, but not to excess." A little while and her fate in life would have been sealed in the ordinary way, and she would have con-

[1] As the hated enemies of the Baglioni the Fiumi are often mentioned in the chronicles of Matarazzo, and they played an important part in the history of their native city. They were Counts of Sterpeto, and the village of that name on the hill to the west of Assisi above the banks of the Chiaggio still belongs to the family.

tinued to look out upon the world through the barred windows of some old Assisan palace; but great changes were being wrought in the town even when Clare had just passed into girlhood. With the rest of her fellow-citizens, rich and poor, she was destined to feel the potent influence of one who suddenly appeared in their midst like an inspired prophet of old, calling on all to repent, and picturing higher ideals in life than any had hitherto dreamed of. Although her first meeting with St. Francis has not been recorded by any early biographer, we may be sure that from the age of fourteen, and perhaps even before, the story of his doings had been familiar to her, for the stir his conversion made among the people, his quarrels with his father, and the many followers he gained, even among the nobles, were of too extraordinary a nature to pass without comment in the family of the Scifi.[1] Their palace being near the Porta Nuova it is certain that Clare and her younger sister Agnes must have often seen St. Francis pass on his way to San Damiano, carrying the bricks which he had begged from door to door to repair its crumbling walls, and heard him scoffed at by the children and cursed by his angry father. As his fame as a preacher grew the Scifi family hurried with the rest to listen to his sermons in the cathedral, or perhaps even in the market-place, where he would stand upon the steps of the old temple and gather the peasants around him on a market day. But the decisive time arrived in the year 1212, when St. Francis, by then the acknowledged founder of a new order sanctioned by the Pope, and no longer jeered at as a mad enthusiast, came to

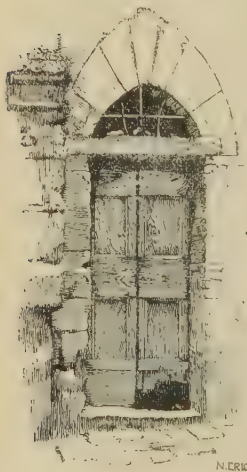
[1] One of the first of the franciscans was Rufino, a nephew of Count Favorino's, whose holiness was such that in speaking of him to the other brethren St. Francis would call him St. Rufino.

preach during Lent in the church of San Giorgio. It was the parish church of the Scifi, and the whole family attended every service. Clare was then eighteen, young enough to be carried away by the words of the franciscan and build for herself a life outside her present existence; old enough to have felt unbearable the trammels of a degraded age, and to long, during those years of warfare to which all the cities of the valley were subjected, for an escape to where peace and purity could be found. Only dimly she saw her way to a perfect love of Christ. The preacher's words were addressed to all, but she felt them as an especial call to herself, and unhesitatingly she resolved to seek out the friar at the Portiuncula and ask his help and counsel in what was no easy task. Instinctively knowing her mother could be of no aid, even if she sympathised in her cravings for a more spiritual life, she gained the confidence of her aunt, Bianca Guelfucci, who all through played her part regardless of Count Favorino's possible revenge.

Even during the first two years of his mission St. Francis was accustomed to receive many men who wished to leave home and comforts, and tramp along the country roads with him, but when the young Chiara Scifi threw herself at his feet imploring him to help her to enter upon a new way of life, his heart was troubled, and, reflecting on what wide results his preaching was taking, fear even may have formed part of his surprise. Bernard of Quintavalle he had bidden sell all that he had, distribute it to the poor, and join him at the leper houses; but before allowing Clare to take the veil he sought to prove her vocation beyond a doubt, and bade her go from door to door through the town begging her bread, clad in rough sack-cloth with a hood drawn about her face. Her piety only increased until St. Francis, believing that he was called upon to

help her, resolved to act the part of the spiritual knight errant.

On Palm Sunday, arrayed in their richest clothes, the members of the Scifi and the Fiumi families attended high mass in the cathedral, and with the rest of the citizens went up to receive the branches of palms. But to the astonishment of all Clare remained kneeling as if wrapt in a dream, and in vain the bishop waited for her to follow the procession to the altar. All eyes were upon her as the bishop, with paternal tenderness, came down from the altar steps to where the young girl knelt and placed the palm in her hand. That night Clare left her father's house for ever. A small door in the Scifi palace is still shown through which she is said to have escaped. It had been walled up for some time, but the fragile girl, gifted that night with superhuman strength and courage, tore down timber and stones and joined Bianca Guelfucci, who was waiting with some trembling maidservants where the arch spans the street, to accompany her to the Portiuncula (see p. 104). Great was the consternation in the family when next morning her flight was discovered, and news came that she had found shelter in the benedictine convent near Bastia. Count Favorino and his wife lost no time in following her,



DOOR THROUGH WHICH ST. CLARE LEFT THE PALAZZO SCIFI

fully persuaded that by threats or entreaties they would be able to induce her to return home and marry the man of her father's choice; but they knew little of the strength of character which lay hidden beneath the gentle nature of the eldest and hitherto most docile of their daughters. The violent words of her father and the tears of her mother in no way shook Clare's determination; approaching the altar she placed one hand upon it while with the other she raised her veil, and facing her parents showed them the close cut hair which marked her as the bride of Jesus Christ. No earthly power, she said, should sever her from the life she had chosen of her own free will, and crest-fallen they left the convent without another word. It was hardly surprising that Agnes, the second sister, who sometimes went to see St. Clare at Bastia, should wish to take the veil. At this the fury of Count Favorino knew no bounds, and he sent his brother Monaldo with several armed followers, among whom may have been Clare's slighted lover, to force Agnes, if persuasion failed, to abandon her vocation. She was at their mercy but refused to leave the convent, so they caught her by her long fair hair and dragged her across the fields towards the town, kicking her as they went; her cries filled the air, "Clare, my sister, help, so that I may not be taken from my heavenly spouse." The prayers of Clare were heard, for suddenly the slight form of the girl became as lead in the arms of the soldiers, and in vain they tried to lift her. Monaldo, beside himself with rage, drew his sword to strike her when his arm dropt withered and useless by his side. Clare, who had by this time come upon the scene, begged them to desist from their cruel acts, and cowed by what had happened they slunk away, leaving the sisters to return to the convent.

St. Francis seeing the devotion and steady vocation

of both Clare and Agnes, and doubtless foreseeing that many would follow their example, began to seek for some shelter where they could lead a life of prayer and labour. Again the Benedictines of Mount Subasio came forward with a gift, offering another humble sanctuary which the saint had repaired some years before. This was San Damiano, a chapel so old that none could tell its origin; the vague legend that it stands on the site of a pagan necropolis seems confirmed by a lofty fragment of Roman masonry which juts up on the roadside between the Porta Nuova and San Damiano. With his own hands St. Francis built a few rude cells near the chapel, resembling the cluster of huts by the Portiuncula, and here the "Poor Ladies" were to pass their days in prayer and manual labour. The little humble grey stone building among the olive trees with the pomgranates flowering against its walls, so different to a convent of the present day, must have seemed to Clare the realisation of a freer life than ever she had known before. Others felt its charm and before long several friends had joined her besides Bianca Guelfucci, while upon the death of Count Favorino, Madonna Ortolana received the habit from the hands of St. Francis together with her youngest daughter Beatrice. The fame of the order spread far and wide, gaining so many novices that several new houses were founded in Italy even during the first few years. In those early days St. Clare was given no written law to follow, but like the brethren she and her nuns learnt all the perfection of a religious life from St. Francis, who would often stop at San Damiano on his way to and from the town. He did not allow them to go beyond their boundaries, but a busy life was to be passed in their cells; owning nothing, they were to depend entirely upon what the brothers could beg for them in the town and country round, and when provisions were scarce they fasted.

In return the nuns spun the grey stuff for the habits of the friars and the linen for their altars; and after St. Francis received the Stigmata, St. Clare fashioned sandals for him with space for the nails so that he might walk with more ease. Often the poor came to seek help at her hands, and many times the sick were tended in a little mud hut near her cell which she used as a hospital. Silently her life was passed, and to those who looked on from the outside perhaps it might have seemed of small avail compared with the very apparent results of St. Francis' endeavours to help his fellow creatures. But very quietly she was guiding the women of mediæval Italy towards higher aims, for even those who could not follow her into the cloister were aided in their lives at home by the thought of the pure-souled gentle nun of San Damiano. Not the least important part of her work was the womanly sympathy and help which she gave to St. Francis. He turned to her when in trouble, and it was she who encouraged him to continue preaching to the people when, at one time he thought that his vocation was to be a life of solitary prayer and not of constant contact with mankind. He counted on her prayers, and trusting in her counsel went forward once more to preach the words of redemption. From her lonely cell she watched his work with tender solicitude, and when blind and ill he came for the last time to San Damiano she tended to his wants in a little hut she erected for him not far from the convent whence, across the vineyard and olive grove which separated them, the first strains of his glorious Canticle to the Sun came to her one morning. Her gentle influence played an important part in his life, giving him a friendship which is one of the most beautiful things to dwell on in their lives. Some have sneered at its purity, and compared so ideal a connection to a commonplace mediæval tale of monk and nun;

but it is degrading even to hint at such an ending to the love of these two for each other, and impossible to believe it after reading M. Sabatier's beautiful chapter on St. Clare, where he touches, in some of his most charming pages, upon a side of St. Francis' character that most biographers have but little understood.

A beautiful story in the *Fioretti* relates how once St. Clare, desiring greatly to eat with St. Francis, a boon he had never accorded her, was granted the request at the earnest prayer of the brethren, "and that she may be the more consoled," he said, "I will that this breaking of bread take place in St. Mary of the Angels; for she has been so long shut up in S. Damian that it will rejoice her to see again the House of Mary, where her hair was shorn off, and she became the bride of Christ." Once more St. Clare came to the plain of the Portiuncula, and the saint spoke so sweetly and eloquently of heavenly things that all remained wrapped in ecstacy, oblivious of the food which was spread before them on the floor and, as Clare dwelt in divine contemplation, a great flame sprang up and shrouded them in celestial light. The Assisans and the people of Bettona, looking down from their walls upon the plain, thought that the Portiuncula was on fire, and hurried to the assistance of their beloved saint. "But coming close to the House," says the *Fioretti*, "they entered within, and found St. Francis and St. Clare with all their company in contemplation wrapt in God as they sat round the humble board." Comforted by this spiritual feast St. Clare returned to San Damiano, where she was expected with great anxiety, as it had been imagined that St. Francis might have sent her to rule some other convent, "wherefore the sisters rejoiced ex-

ceedingly when they saw her face again." Those were peaceful and happy days, but sorrow came when news reached her that St. Francis was near his end; "she wept most bitterly, and refused to be comforted," for she too was ill, and feared to die before she could see his face again. This fear she signified through a brother unto the Blessed Francis, and when the saint, who loved her with a singular and paternal affection, heard it, he had pity on her; and considering that her desire to see him once more could not be fulfilled in the future, he sent her a letter with his benediction and absolving her from every fault. . . . "Go and tell sister Clare to lay aside all sadness and sorrow, for now she cannot see me, but of a truth before her death both she and her sisters shall see me and be greatly comforted." But the last she saw of him was through a lattice window, when they brought his dead body for the nuns to see and kiss the pierced hands and feet (see p. 119).

A strange thing happened to disturb the peaceful serenity of their lives at San Damiano in the year 1234, when the army of Frederic II, was fighting in the north of Italy, and a detachment of Saracen troops under one of his generals, Vitale d'Anversa, came through Umbria, pillaging the country as they passed. Assisi was a desirable prey, as it had been to many before them, and coming to the convent of San Damiano they scaled its walls, preparatory to a final rush upon the town. The terror of the nuns may be imagined, and running to the cell where Clare lay ill in bed they cowered round her "like frightened doves when the hawk has stooped upon their dovecote." Taking the Blessed Sacrament, which she was allowed to keep in a little chapel next to her cell, she proceeded to face the whole army, trusting like St.

Martin in the power of prayer and personal courage. As she walked towards the window overlooking the small courtyard a voice spoke to her from the ciborium saying, "Assisi will have much to suffer, but my arm shall defend her." Raising the Blessed Sacrament on high she stood at the open window, against which the soldiers had already placed a ladder; those who were ascending, as they looked up towards her, fell back blinded, while the others took to flight, and thus cloister and city were saved through the intercession of the gentle saint. Vitale d'Anversa, who had not been present at the prodigy, probably thinking the soldiers had failed in their enterprise through lack of valour, came with a still larger company of men, and led them in person to storm the town. St. Clare, hearing what peril encompassed Assisi, and being asked by the citizens to intercede with Heaven as the enemy had sworn to bury them beneath their city walls, gathered all her nuns about her, and knelt in prayer with them. At dawn the next morning a furious tempest arose, scattering the tents of the Saracens in every direction, and causing such a panic that they took refuge in hasty flight. The

SAN DAMIANO, SHOWING THE WINDOW WITH THE LEDGE WHENCE ST. CLARE ROUTED THE SARACENS

gratitude of the citizens increased their love for St. Clare, as all attributed their release to her prayers, and to this day she is regarded as the deliverer of her country.

One cannot help regretting that while so many contemporary chroniclers have left detailed and varied accounts of St. Francis, they only casually allude to St. Clare, calling her "a sweet spring blossom," or "the chief rival of the Blessed Francis in the observance of Gospel perfection," but leaving later writers to form their own pictures of the saint. And the picture they give is always of a silent and prayerful nun, beautiful of feature, sweet and gentle of disposition, coming ever to the help of those who needed it, and acting the part of a guardian angel to the Assisans. Her horizon was bounded by the mountains of the Spoletan valley; and from the outside world, on which her influence worked so surely during her life and for long centuries after her death, only faint echoes reached her when a pope or a cardinal came to see her, or a princess wrote her a letter from some distant country. Among the many royal and noble people who had entered a Poor Clare sisterhood, or like St. Elizabeth of Hungary had joined the Third Order, was the Blessed Agnes, daughter of the King of Bohemia, who, kindled with a desire for a religious life upon hearing the story of St. Clare, refused the hand of Frederick II, and passed her life in a convent. Often she wrote to the Assisan abbess getting in reply most charming letters, beginning "To her who is dearer to me than any other mortal," or "To the daughter of the King of Kings, to the Queen of Virgins, to the worthy spouse of Jesus Christ; the unworthy servant of the poor nuns of San Damiano sends greetings and rejoicings in the good fortune of living always in the extremest poverty." These two never met, but their friendship was a close one, and their

correspondence, of which many letters are preserved, ceased only with their death.

St. Clare survived St. Francis twenty-seven years, and they were sad years for one, who, like her clung so devoutly to his rule and teaching. She lived to see the first divisions among the franciscans, and before she died the corner-stone of the great Basilica had been raised, filling her with dismay for the future, for in its very grandeur and beauty she saw the downfall of the franciscan ideal. Not only did she witness all these changes, but in her own convent she had many battles to fight for the preservation of the rule she loved, she even courageously opposed the commands of the Pope himself who wished to mould the nuns to his wishes as he had done the friars. Even during the lifetime of St. Francis, while he was absent on a distant pilgrimage, Gregory IX, then Cardinal Ugolino, persuaded St. Clare of the necessity of having a written rule, and gave her that of the Benedictine nuns. But when she found that, although it was strict enough, it allowed the holding of property in community, which was entirely against the spirit of her order, she refused to agree to the innovation. So upon the saint's return he composed a written rule for the sisters, so strict, it is said, that its perusal drew tears from the eyes of the Cardinal Ugolino. Still she had to fight the battle of loyalty to a dead saint's memory; for the very year that Gregory came to Assisi for the canonisation of St. Francis he paid a visit to St. Clare, and with earnest words endeavoured to persuade her to mitigate her rule. She held so firmly to her way that the Pope thought she might perhaps be thinking of the vow of poverty which she had made at the Portiuncula, and told her he could absolve her from it through the powers of his papal, keys. Then Clare summoned all her courage as she faced the Pontiff, and said to him

these simple words which showed him he need try no more to tempt her from duty, "Ah holy father," she cried, "I crave for the absolution of my sins, but I desire not to be absolved from following Jesus Christ."

Gregory had often been puzzled by the unique unworldliness of St. Francis; his admiration for St. Clare was even more profound, and in reading his letters after leaving the franciscan abbess one forgets that he was over eighty at the time. With him she had gained her point once and for all, but upon his death she had to oppose the wishes of Innocent IV, who did all in his power to merge the franciscan order of Poor Clares into an ordinary Benedictine community. Again it ended in the triumph of St. Clare, and the day before her death she had the joy of receiving the news that the Pope had issued a papal bull sanctioning the rule for which both St. Francis and she had fought; namely, that they were to live absolutely poor without any worldly possession of any kind. "N'est-ce pas," says M. Sabatier, "un des plus beaux tableaux de l'histoire religieuse, que celui de cette femme qui, pendant plus d'un quart de siècle, soutient contre les papes qui se succèdent sur le trône pontifical une lutte de tous les instants; qui demeure également respectueuse et inébranlable, et ne consent à mourir qu'après avoir remporté la victoire?"

St. Clare during the remaining years of her life suffered continually from ill-health, and it was from a bed of infirmity that she so ardently prayed the Pope to sanction her rule of poverty, and enjoined the sisterhood to keep its tenets faithfully. Like St. Francis, brave and cheerful to the last, she called her weeping companions around her to give them her final blessing and farewell. Among them knelt the Blessed Agnes, who had come from her nunnery in Florence to assist her sister, and the three holy brethren Leo,

Angelo and Juniper. On the 11th of August 1253, the feast of St. Rufino, as she was preparing to leave the world they heard her speak, but so softly that the words were lost to them. "Mother, with whom are you conversing?" asked one of the nuns, and she answered: "Sister, I am speaking with this little soul of mine, now blessed, to whom the glory of paradise is already opening."

Then as the evening closed in and they were still watching, a great light was seen to fill the doorway leading from the oratory of St. Clare to her cell; and from out of it came a long procession of white-robed virgins led by the Queen of Heaven, whose head was crowned with a diadem of shining gold, and whose eyes sent forth such splendour as might have changed the night into the brightest day. And as each of the celestial visitors stooped to kiss St. Clare, the watching nuns knew that her soul had already reached its home.

. . . . . .

Once the little chapel of San Damiano has been seen there can be no fear of ever forgetting the charm attached to the memory of St. Clare, for she has left there something of her own character and personality, which we feel instinctively without being able quite to explain its presence. So near the town, only just outside its walls, this little sanctuary yet remains as in the olden times, one of the most peaceful spots that could have been chosen for a nunnery; but the silence which falls upon one while resting on the stone seats before entering the courtyard, has this difference with the silence of such a piazza as that of San Rufino or of some of the Assisan streets; that there the buildings tell of an age which is dead whose memories raise no responsive echoes in our hearts, whereas San Damiano is filled with the associations of those who, living so long ago, yet have left the atmosphere of their presence as a living

influence among us. As we look at the steep paths below us leading through the fields and the oak trees down to the plain, to Rivo-Torto and the Portiuncula, we think how often St. Francis went up and down it whenever he passed to see St. Clare and her sisters. And how many times did Brother Bernard come with messages when he lay dying, and news was anxiously awaited at San Damiano; then along the grass path skirting the hill from Porta Mojano were seen the crowds of nobles, townsfolk, peasants and friars bearing the dead body of the saint to San Giorgio, and pausing awhile at the convent for the love of St. Clare. A pope with all his cardinals next passes, on a visit to the young abbess; St. Bonaventure stops to ask her prayers; while the poor and the ill were ever knocking at the convent door to obtain her help or a word of kindly sympathy. In the Umbrian land it is so easy to realise these things, they are more than simply memories for those who have time to pause and dream awhile; and sometimes it has seemed, while reading the *Fioretti* or Brother Leo's chronicle beneath the olive trees of San Damiano, that we have slipped back through the ages, and looking up we half expect to see the hurrying figure of St. Francis moving quickly in and out among the trees. Suddenly the low sound of chanting comes through the open door of the convent reaching us like the incessant drone of a swarm of bees in the sunshine, until it dies away, and brown-clothed, sandalled brethren pass out across the courtyard, and two by two disappear down the hill on their way to the Portiuncula. They bring a whole gallery of portraits before our eyes, of brethren we read of, the companions of St. Francis; but when we look along the path they have taken and see the church of the Angeli standing high in the midst of the broad valley, its dome showing dark purple against the afternoon light, where we had

thought to catch a glimpse of the Portiuncula and a circle of mud huts, the dream of the olden time fades suddenly away. As we turn to enter the little church of San Damiano with the image of the great church of the plain still in our thoughts, we feel how much we owe to the reverence of the people and the friars who have kept it so simple and unadorned, its big stones left rough and weather-beaten as when St. Francis came to prepare a dwelling-house for sister Clare. Truly says M. Sabatier, "ce petit coin de terre ombrienne sera, pour nos descendants, comme ce puits de Jacob où Jésus s'assit un instant, un des parvis préférés du culte en esprit et en vérité."

The church is very small and dim, with no frescoed walls or altar pictures to arouse the visitor's interest, and only its connection with the names of Francis and Clare bring the crowds who come to pray here. Even the crucifix which spoke to St. Francis, telling him to rebuild the ruined sanctuary, no longer hangs in the choir, but is now in the keeping of the nuns in Santa Chiara. A few relics are kept in the cupboard—a pectoral cross given by St. Bonaventure, the bell with which St. Clare called the sisters to office, her breviary written by Brother Leo in his neat, small writing, and the tabernacle of alabaster which she held up before the invading host of Saracens upon that memorable occasion. There is also a small loaf of bread which recalls the well-known story recounted in the *Fioretti* (cap. xxxiii.) of how Pope Innocent IV, came to see St. Clare, "to hear her speak of things celestial and divine; and as they were thus discoursing together on diverse matters, St. Clare ordered dinner to be made ready, and the bread to be laid on the table so that the Holy Father might bless it; and when their spiritual conference was finished, St. Clare, kneeling most reverently, prayed him to bless the bread which was on the

table. The Holy Father replied: 'Most faithful Sister Clare, I will that thou shouldst bless this bread and make upon it the sign of the most blessed Cross of Christ, to whom thou hast so entirely given thyself.' St. Clare said: 'Holy Father, pardon me, for I should be guilty of too great a presumption if in the presence of the Vicar of Christ, I, who am but a miserable woman, should presume to give such a benediction.' And the Pope answered: 'That this should not be ascribed to presumption, but to the merit of obedience, I command thee by holy obedience to make the sign of the Holy Cross on this bread, and to bless it in the name of God.' Then St. Clare, as a true daughter of obedience, most devoutly blessed that bread with the sign of the Holy Cross. And marvellous to say, incontinently on all the loaves the sign of the Holy Cross appeared most fairly impressed; then of that bread part was eaten and part kept for the miracle's sake."

A ring belonging to St. Clare was also kept here, until in the year 1615 a Spanish franciscan vicar-general with his secretary came to visit San Damiano, and such was his devotion for anything that had belonged to the saintly abbess that when a few months later the relics were being shown to some other visitors, the precious ring was missing. A great disturbance arose in the city, and angry letters were speedily sent after the Spanish priest as suspicion had fallen upon him at once; he did not deny that he had piously stolen the ring, but as it was now well upon its way to Spain where, he assured the irate Assisans, it would be much honoured and well cared for, he refused to return it. The citizens and friars still regret the day that the Spanish dignitary and his secretary called at San Damiano.

The small chapel out of the nave was built in the

middle of the seventeenth century to contain the large Crucifix which is still there, and whose story is very famous. In 1634 Brother Innocenzo of Palermo was sent to the convent to carve a crucifix for the friars, his sanctity and the talent he possessed as an artist being well known. After nine days he completed all except the head, and on returning next morning after early mass he found that mysterious hands had fashioned it during the night; not only was it of wonderful workmanship, but looking at it from three different points of view three different expressions were seen—of peace, of agony, and of death. The fame of the Crucifix spread throughout Umbria, and people flocked to San Damiano. "Now, the devil," says a chronicler, "very wrath to see such devotion in so many hearts, turned his mind to finding out some means of sowing seeds of discord. Through his doing there arose in Assisi a whisper that owing to the rapidly growing fame of this Crucifix, the ancient one of the cathedral would lose the veneration in which it had hitherto been held."

Now before placing the Crucifix of San Damiano in its place over the high altar the monks settled that it should be carried in solemn procession through Assisi. "But," writes the angry chronicler, "those who had joined this diabolical conspiracy against our Crucifix were not slow to prevent this, and had recourse to the Inquisitor of Perugia, who was induced to send his vicar to stop the procession, and bid the monks of San Damiano to keep their Crucifix hidden and allow no one to see it." There arose a terrible storm in the troubled community of Assisi, between those who took the part of the "persecuted Crucifix" and those who sided with the jealous canons of the cathedral. Finally, the case was placed before the Pope himself, and all waited anxiously the result of his investigations. A duplicate of the Crucifix of

San Damiano was sent to Rome that it might be well examined by the Pope and the whole college of cardinals, and they not finding in the pious Brother Innocenzio's work anything contrary to the teaching of the gospel, it was unanimously decreed that the Crucifix of San Damiano might receive all the homage and love of the friars and citizens. So on a burning Sunday in August solemn high mass was sung at the altar of St. Clare in San Damiano and, although the friars were defrauded of their procession, such was the concourse of people who came to gain the plenary indulgence granted by His Holiness that the good friars rejoiced, and were comforted for all the persecution they had suffered on account of this marvellous Crucifix. What must have been the feelings of Brother Innocenzo as he stood by the high altar and watched the crowd of worshippers and the women lifting up their streaming eyes to the crucifix he had fashioned in his cell? The devotion to it grew as the years passed on, and we read that a century later the monks were obliged "for their greater quiet to transfer it from the choir to the chapel," where it now is, after which the monks could say their office in peace. Now we see it surrounded with votive offerings, and our guide pours forth an incessant stream of praise, and recounts at length numberless miracles.

Through the chapel of the Crucifix we reach the choir of St. Clare, left as when she used it, with the old worm-eaten stalls against the wall. It is probable that originally this was part of the house of the priest who had the keeping of San Damiano before the benedictines gave it to the Poor Clares; for here is shown the recess in the wall where St. Francis hid when his father came to seek for him, and where he is supposed to have lived in hiding for a whole month until the storm should have blown

over. It was for the rebuilding of the chapel that he had taken bales of costly stuffs from the Bernardone warehouse in Assisi to sell at the fair of Foligno, and thus called forth the wrath of Messer Pietro. The good priest of San Damiano was so much astonished at this sudden conversion of Francis, that thinking he mocked him he refused to accept the purse of gold, which Francis finally threw on to a dusty window-sill. But the priest soon became his friend, allowing him to remain at San Damiano and partake of such humble fare as he could give, joining him in repairing of the poor ruined chapel.

An artist of the sixteenth century had sought to adorn the altar with a fresco of the Crucifixion which was only discovered a few months ago, but the white-washed walls and severe simplicity of the rest seem more in keeping with the place than this crude attempt at decoration. By a rough flight of stairs we reach the small private oratory of St. Clare, which communicated with her cell and where, in her latter days of illness, she was permitted to keep the Blessed Sacrament. The rest of the convent being strict "clausura," ever since the Marquess of Ripon bought San Damiano from the Italian Government and gave it into the keeping of the franciscan friars, can only be seen by men. Within is the refectory of St. Clare where Innocent IV, dined with her and witnessed the miracle of the loaves, and Eusebio di San Giorgio (1507) has painted in the cloister two fine frescoes of the Annunciation and St. Francis receiving the Stigmata.

But anyone may step out into the small and charming garden of St. Clare which is on a level with her oratory. Walls rising on either side leave only a narrow vista of the valley where Bevagna, and Montefalco on her hill, can just be seen. Within

this small enclosed space the saint is said to have taken her daily exercise and carefully attended to the flowers, and the friars to this day keep a row of flowers there in memory of her. It will be well on leaving the chapel of San Damiano to look at the open chapel in the courtyard where Tiberio d'Assisi has painted one of his most pleasing compositions. The Madonna is seated in an Umbrian valley, low lines of hills fade away in the distance, and franciscan saints, among whom St. Jerome with his lion seems curiously out of place, surround her, while at her feet is placed the kneeling figure of the nun who succeeded St. Clare as abbess. It is signed and dated 1517, while the fresco on the side-wall of St. Sebastian and St. Roch was painted five years later. In another corner of the courtyard, near the entrance, is a painting in a niche of the Madonna and saints by some Umbrian artist who felt the influence of both Giotto and Simone Martini, so that we have a curious, if pleasing result.

Santa Chiara

St. Clare was no sooner dead than the people, as they had done with St. Francis, sought to honour her memory, but in this case, Innocent IV, being in Assisi for the consecration of the Franciscan Basilica, the funeral service was conducted by the Pope and cardinals. Such a gathering of church dignitaries, Assisan nobles, priors and people had certainly never been seen in the humble convent of San Damiano; their presence, though honouring the saint, filled the hearts of the nuns with sorrow for they knew they had come to take the body of St. Clare to Assisi. With tears they consented to its being placed in safety in San Giorgio, but only on the condition that they might eventually be allowed

to live near her tomb in some humble shelter. San Damiano without her, alive or dead, meant little to them, and they were ready to abandon a home of so many memories to go where they and their successors could guard her body to the end of time. Devotion to her memory and belief in her sanctity was not solely confined to them; when the friars rose to intone the service of the dead, Pope Innocent signified that there should be silence, and to the wonder of all ordered high mass to be sung and the funeral service to be changed into one of triumph, in honour of her who he believed was already with the Virgins in heaven. It was a kind of canonisation, but could not be regarded as valid without the usual preliminaries being performed, and the cardinals, more cautious and less enthusiastic than His Holiness, persuaded him to wait and in the meanwhile allow the ordinary service to proceed. To this he consented, and then amidst music and singing the Pope led the people up the hill where years before another saint had been borne to the same church of San Giorgio, and as on that day a funeral ceremony became a triumphal procession.

Innocent IV, died soon after, and it was Alexander IV, who in September 1255, two years after her death, canonized St. Clare in a Bull replete with magnificent eulogy in which there is a constant play upon her name: "Clara claris præclara meritis, magnæ in coelo claritate gloriæ, ac in terra miraculorum sublimum clare gaudet . . . O admiranda Claræ beatæ claritas." Another two years were allowed to elapse before they began to erect a building to her memory; besides the readiness shown by every town to honour their saints, the Assisans had especial cause to remember St. Clare, as she had twice saved them from the Saracen army of Frederic

II. Willingly the magistrates and nobles, besides many strangers who had heard of the saint's renown, contributed money for the new building, and Fra Filippo Campello the minorite was chosen as the architect. Fine as his new work proved to be it was rather the copy of a masterpiece than the inspiration of a great architect, which makes it more probable that he was only employed in completing the church of San Francesco from the designs of that first mysterious architect, and not, as some have said, its sole builder.

The canons of San Rufino offered the church and hospital of San Giorgio which belonged to them. A more fitting site for the church to be raised in honour of St. Clare could not have been chosen, for it was here that St. Francis had learnt to read and write as a child under the guidance of the parish priest; here he preached his first sermon, and later touched the heart of Clare by his words during the lenten services; and here both of them were laid in their stone urns until their last resting places were ready. So around the little old parish church with its many memories, and within sight of the Scifi palace, arose "as if by magic" the new temple with its tall and slender campanile. The hospital enlarged and improved became the convent, and the church was used by the nuns as a choir, the rest of the large building, which they could only see through iron gratings, being for the use of the congregation. With its alternate layers of pink and cream-coloured stone, wheel window and finely modelled door, the church fits well into its sunny piazza, and is a beautiful ending to the eastern side of Assisi. But in building it Fra Filippo forgot the crumbling nature of the soil, and failed to overcome the difficulty of position as had been done so admirably at San Francesco, so that in 1351 it became necessary to prop up the sides

by strong flying buttresses, which, while serving as an imposing arched entrance to the side of the church, sadly detract from the feeling of solidity of the main building. A darker stone with no rosy tints was used for the convent, which makes it look very grim and

SANTA CHIARA

old as it rises out of a soft and silvery setting of olive trees on the hillside, with orchards near of peaches and almonds. There is a great charm in the brown, weather-beaten convent, though a certain sadness when we remember, in looking at its tiny windows like holes in the wall through which only narrow vistas of the beautiful valley can be seen, how changed must be the lives of these cloistered nuns from those of the Poor

Ladies of San Damiano in the time of St. Clare. They are now an order of the orthodox type, an order given to prayer and not to labour, and seeing no human face from the outside world except through an iron grating. So early as 1267 their connection with the franciscan brotherhood ceased; the brethren no longer heard their confessions or begged for them through the land as St. Francis had decreed; they lived under the patronage of the Pope, who declared their convent to be under the especial jurisdiction of the Holy See, and on the feast of St. Francis called upon the nuns to send a pound of wax candles in sign of tribute. As the Pope had often in olden times become master of Assisi so now he obtained the rule over her monastic institutions, gaining the temporal allegiance of the religious, as he had gained that of the citizens.

Upon entering the church of Santa Chiara out of the sunshine, we are struck with a sense of the coldness of its scant ornamentation, a want of colour, and a general idea that artists in first directing their steps to San Francesco had not had time to give much thought to the church of the gentle saint. Giottino is said by Vasari to have painted frescoes here, and they may be those ruined bits of colour in the right transept where it is only possible to distinguish a few heads or parts of figures here and there in what seems to be a procession, perhaps the Translation of St. Clare from San Damiano to San Giorgio. It is said that their present condition of ruin is due to the German bishop Spader who, fearing that the nuns might see too much of the world through the narrow grating because of the number of people who came to see the frescoes, had them whitewashed in the seventeenth century. The people came less, the nuns were safer, but Giottino's (?) frescoes are lost to us and we do not bless the memory of the German bishop of Assisi. The frescoes of the ceiling he did not

touch, and we have in them some interesting work of an artist of the fourteenth century whose name is unknown, but who undoubtedly followed the Giottesque traditions, though not with the fidelity or the genius of the artist who painted the legend of St. Nicholas in San Francesco. In decorating the four spandrels he has been influenced by the allegories of Giotto, and the angels are grouped round the principal figures in much the same manner; they kneel, some with hands crossed upon their breasts, but they are silent worshippers with not a single instrument among them. The saints who stand in the midst of the angels in Gothic tabernacles are the Madonna with a charming Infant Jesus who grasps her mantle, and St. Clare; St. Cecilia crowned with roses, and St. Lucy; St. Agnes holding a lamb, and St. Rose of Viterbo; St Catherine, and St. Margaret with a book in her hand. The artist has used such soft harmonious colours and bordered his frescoes with such pretty medallions of saints' heads and designs of foliage that one wishes he had been given the whole church to decorate and thus saved it from its present desolate appearance.

The large crucifix behind the altar, a characteristic work of that time, has been ascribed to Margaritone, Giunta Pisano, or Cimabue. It was painted, as the inscription says, by the order of the abbess Benedicta, who succeeded St. Clare and was the first to rule in the new convent, but the artist did not sign his name. The chapel of St. Agnes contains a Madonna which Herr Thode with far-seeing eyes recognises through all its layers of modern paint as Cimabue's work. There is also a much retouched, but rather charming picture of St. Clare, painted according to its inscription in 1283. She stands in her heavy brown dress and mantle, a thick cord round her waist, and on either side are scenes from her life. The small triptych of

the Crucifixion on a gold ground is an interesting work by the artist of the four frescoes of the ceiling, and a nearer view of some of the peculiarities of his style is obtained. It is impossible to mistake the long slender necks, the curiously shaped ears with the upper part very long, the narrow eyes, straight noses and small mouths, sometimes drooping slightly at the corners, which he gives his figures. He is another of those nameless painters who came to Assisi in the wake of the great Florentine.

The visitor would leave Santa Chiara with a feeling of disappointment were it not for the chapel of San Giorgio, the original place so often mentioned in connection with St. Francis and now open to the public. The crucifix of the tenth century, so famous for having bowed its head to St. Francis in the church of San Damiano bidding him to repair the ruined churches of Assisi, is to be removed from the parlour, where it is temporarily kept, and placed behind the altar. The chapel, with a groined roof, is square, small and of perfect form, and ornamented with several frescoes. On the left wall is a delightful St. George fighting the dragon in the presence of a tall princess, her face showing very white against her red hair. There is a naïve scene of the Magi, whose sleeves are as long and whose hands are as spidery as those of the princess; and above is an Annunciation. Behind the curtain in the fresco a small child is standing who is evidently the donor, but some people believe he represents the Infant Jesus, which certainly would account for the surprised attitude of the Virgin. This wall was painted in the sixteenth century by some artist of the Gubbio school, but his name we have been unable to discover. Quite a different character marks the frescoes upon the next wall, which would seem to be the work of an Umbrian scholar of Simone Martini, or at least by one more

influenced by the Sienese than the Florentine masters. There is a softness and an ivory tone in the paintings of the saints, a languid look in their eyes, a sweetness about the mouth peculiar to the Umbrian followers of Simone, who like him succeed less well with male than with female saints. Here the Madonna, seated on a Gothic throne against a crimson dais, with a broad forehead and blue eyes, her soft veil falling in graceful folds about her slender neck, is unusually charming. The St. George with his shield is perhaps less disappointing than St. Francis, but then Simone fails to quite express the nature of the Seraphic Preacher. We turn to St. Clare of the oval face and clear brown eyes, and feel that the painter had a subject which appealed to him, even to the brown habit and black veil which makes the face seem more delicate and fair. Above are the Crucifixion, Entombment and Resurrection, suggesting in the strained attitudes of the figures a follower of Pietro Lorenzetti. Some remains of frescoes upon the next wall resemble those in the nave of the Lower Church, and probably also belong to the second half of the thirteenth century. Indeed the architecture of the chapel bears a striking resemblance to San Francesco, so that although this is the original building of San Giorgio which existed long before the Franciscan Basilica, it was in all probability remodelled by Fra Campello, who may have given it the pretty groined roof.

But above all the works of art and all the views of church or convent, the pious pilgrim treasures the privilege of being able to gaze upon the body of the saint in the crypt below the high altar reached by a broad flight of marble stairs. St. Clare had been buried so far out of sight and reach that her tomb was only found in the year 1850, after much search had been made. Five bishops, with Cardinal Pecci, now

Pope Leo XIII, and the magistrates of the town, were present at the opening of the sepulchre; the iron bars which bound it were filed asunder, and the body of the saint was found lying clad in her brown habit as if buried but a little while since; the wild thyme which her companions had sprinkled round her six hundred years ago, withered as it was, still sent up a sweet

SANTA CHIARA FROM NEAR THE PORTA MOJANO

fragrance, while a few green and tender leaves are said to have been clinging to her veil. So great was the joy at discovering this precious relic that a procession was organised "with pomp impossible to describe."

On the Sunday at dawn every bell commenced to ring calling the people to high mass, and never, says a proud chronicler, were so many bishops and such a crowd seen as upon that day. At the elevation of the Host the bells pealed forth again announcing the solemn moment to the neighbouring villages; soon after the procession was formed of lay confrater-

nities, priests and friars, and little children dressed as angels strewed the way with flowers. The peasants, with tears raining down their cheeks, pressed near the coffin, and had to be kept back by some of the Austrian soldiers then quartered in Assisi. First they went to the Cathedral, then to San Francesco, "the body of St. Clare thus going to salute the body of her great master. Oh admirable disposition of God." It was evening before they returned to the church of Santa Chiara, where the nuns anxiously awaited them at the entrance of their cloister to place the body of their foundress in the chapel of San Giorgio until a sanctuary should be built beneath the high altar. It was soon finished, ornamented with Egyptian alabaster and Italian marbles, and the body of St. Clare was laid there to be venerated by the faithful.

As pilgrims stand before a grating in the dimly lighted crypt the gentle rustle of a nun's dress is heard; slowly invisible hands draw the curtain aside, and St. Clare is seen lying in a glass case upon a satin bed, her face clearly outlined against her black and white veils, whilst her brown habit is drawn in straight folds about her body. She clasps the book of her Rule in one hand, and in the other holds a lily with small diamonds shining on the stamens. The silence is unbroken save for the gentle clicking of the rosary beads slipping through the fingers of the invisible nun who keeps watch, and as she lets the curtain down again and blows out the lights there is a feeling that we have intruded upon the calm sleep of the "Seraphic Mother."

CHAPTER X

Other Buildings in the Town

The Cathedral of San Rufino. Roman Assisi. The Palazzo Pubblico. The Chiesa Nuova. S. Paolo. Sta. Maria Maggiore. S. Quirico. S. Appolinare. S. Pietro. The Confraternities (Chiesa dei Pellegrini, etc.). The Castle.

ASSISI is the only town we know of in Italy where the interest does not centre round its cathedral and a certain sadness is felt, which perhaps is not difficult to explain; St. Francis holds all in his spell now just as he held the people long ago, so that the saints who first preached Christianity to the Assisans, were martyred and brought honour to the city, are almost forgotten and their churches deserted. The citizens, though proud of their Duomo, with its beautiful brown façade, hardly appear to love it, and we have often thought that they too feel the sense of gloom and isolation in the small piazza, which makes it a place ill-fitted to linger in for long. Men come and go so silently, women fill their pitchers at the fountain but only the splashing of water is heard, and they quickly disappear down a street; even the houses have no life, for while the windows are open no one looks out, and the total absence of flowers gives them a further look of desolation. This part of the town was already old in mediæval times, and the far away mystery of an age which has few records still lives around the cathedral and its bell tower. San Rufino stands in the very

centre of Roman Assisi and its history begins very soon after the Roman era, one might say was contemporary with it, as the saint whose name it bears, was

CAMPANILE OF SAN RUFINO

martyred in the reign of Diocletian. All the details of his death, together with the charming legend about the building of the cathedral, come down to us in a hymn by St. Peter Damian, who, although writing in 1052 of things which it is true happened long before,

had very likely learnt the traditions about it from the Assisans while he lived in his mountain hermitage near Gubbio. The story goes back to the time when the Roman consul of Assisi received orders to stamp out the fast-spreading roots of Christianity, and began his work by putting to death St. Rufino, the pastor of the tiny flock. The soldiers hurried the Bishop down to the river Chiaggio and, after torturing him in horrible fashion, flung him into the water with a heavy stone round his neck. Some say that the Emperor Diocletian came in person to see his orders carried out. That night the Assisan Christians stole down to the valley to rescue the body of their Bishop and place it in safety within the castle of Costano, which still stands in the fields close to the river but almost hidden by the peasant houses built around it. Here, in a marble sarcophagus he rested, cared for and protected by each succeeding generation of Christians who had learned from tradition to love his memory, and secretly they visited the castle in the plain to pray by the tomb of the martyred saint. Their vigilance continued until the fifth century, when the Christians had already begun to burn the Pagan temples and build churches of their own. Christianity, indeed, spread so rapidly throughout Umbria that other towns cultivated a love for relics, and fearing that the body of St. Rufino might be stolen from the castle in the open country, the Assisans took the first opportunity of bringing it within the town. In the year 412 Bishop Basileo, with his clergy and congregation met at Costano, to seek through prayer some inspiration so that they might know where to take the body of their saint. As they knelt by his tomb an old man of venerable aspect suddenly appeared among them, and spoke these words in the Lord's name: "Take," he said, 'two heifers which have not felt the yoke, and harness them

to a car whereon you shall lay the body of St. Rufino. Follow the road taken by the heifers and where they stop, there, in his honour shall ye build a church." These words were faithfully obeyed : the heifers, knowing what they were to do, turned towards Assisi, and brought the relics, through what is now the Porta S. Pietro, to that portion of the old town known as the "Good Mother" because the goddess Ceres is said to be buried there. The heifers then turned slowly round, faced the Bishop and his people, and refused to move. For some obscure reason the place did not please the Assisans, and they began to build a church further up the hill ; but every morning they found the walls, which had been erected during the preceding day, pulled down, until discouraged, they submitted to the augury, and returned to the spot chosen by the heifers. Before long, over the tomb of the Roman goddess, arose the first Christian church of Assisi, dedicated to San Rufino.

A few years ago the late Canon Elisei who has written many interesting pamphlets on the cathedral, obtained permission from the government to clear away the rubble beneath the present church ; masses of Roman inscriptions and pieces of sculpture were brought to light, together with part of the primitive church of Bishop Basileo, and the whole of what is known as the Chiesa Ugonia, from the Bishop of that name who built it in 1028. With lighted torches the visitor can descend to the primitive basilica and realise what a peaceful spot had been chosen for this early place of worship, while picturing the Christians as they knelt round the body of their Bishop, the light falling dimly upon them through the narrow Lombard windows. The six columns, with their varied capitals rising straight from the ground without the support of bases, give a somewhat

funereal aspect, recalling a crypt rather than a church. The few vestiges of frescoes in the apse—St. Mark and his lion, and St. Costanso, Bishop of Perugia—are said to be, with the paintings in S. Celso at Verona, the oldest in Italy after those in the catacombs at Rome. Ruins of other frescoes, perhaps of the same date, can be traced above the door of the first basilica, together with some stone-work in low relief of vine leaves and grapes, but it is difficult to see them without going behind a column built in total disregard of this lower building. The Roman sarcophagus is still in the apse where the altar once stood, but open and neglected, for the body of St. Rufino now lies beneath the altar of the present cathedral. It is ornamented in rough high relief with the story of Endymion; Diana steps from her chariot towards the sleeping shepherd, Pomona has her arms full of fruit and flowers, and there are nymphs and little gods of love and sleep. "It appeared to us," remarks one prudish chronicler of the church, "the first time we beheld it, that it was indecent to have present before the eyes of the faithful so unseemly a fable; our scruples we however laid aside in remembering that Holy Church is endowed with the power of purging from temples, altars and urns, all pagan abominations, and from superstition to turn them to the true service of God." No such scruples existed during the early times, and there is an amusing story of how the people wishing to place the marble sarcophagus, which had been left at Costano five centuries before, in the Chiesa Ugonia, were prevented by the Bishop who admired it, and had given orders that it should be brought to his palace at Sta. Maria Maggiore. A great tumult arose in the town, but although the people came to blows and the fight was serious on both sides, no blood was shed. A further miracle took place when the

Bishop, determined to have his way, sent sixty men down to Costano who were unable to move the sarcophagus which remained as though rooted in the earth; and the event was the more remarkable as seven men afterwards brought it at a run up the hill to the church of San Rufino, where it remains to this day.

Already two basilicas had been built in honour of the saint, but the Assisans dissatisfied with their size and magnificence, in the year 1134 called in the most famous architect of the day, Maestro Giovanni of Gubbio, who before his death in 1210 had all but completed the present cathedral and campanile. It is a great surprise when, emerging from the narrow street leading from the Piazza Minerva thinking to have seen all that is loveliest in Assisi, we suddenly catch sight of the cathedral and its bell-tower. The rough brown stone which Maestro Giovanni has so beautifully worked into delicately rounded columns, cornices, rose-windows and doors with fantastic beasts, sometimes looks as dark as a capucin's habit, but there are moments in the late afternoon when all the warmth of the sun's rays sinks into it, radiating hues of golden orange which as suddenly deepen to dark brown again as the light dies away behind the Perugian hills.

All three doors are fine with their quaint ornaments of birds and beasts and flowers, but upon the central one Giovanni expended all his art. It is framed in by a double pattern of water-lilies and leaves, of human faces, beasts, penguins and other birds with a colour in their wings like tarnished gold. The red marble lions which guard the entrance, with long arched necks and symmetrical curls, a human figure between their paws, may belong to an even earlier period, and perhaps were taken by Giovanni da Gubbio from the Chiesa Ugonia to decorate his

façade, together with the etruscan-looking figures of God the Father, the Virgin and St. Rufino in the

N·ERICHSEN·

DOOR OF SAN RUFINO

lunette above. Just below the windows a long row of animals, such pre-historic beasts as may have walked upon Subasio when no man was there to interrupt their

passage, seem to move in endless procession, and look down with faces one has seen in dreams.

The interior of the cathedral is a disappointment; at first we accuse the great Maestro Giovanni for this painful collection of truncated lines and inharmonious shapes, until we find how utterly his work was ruined in the sixteenth century by Galeazzo Alessi of Perugia. To understand what the church was five centuries before Alessi came, it is necessary to climb the campanile (only those who are attracted by ricketty ladders and dizzy heights are advised to make the trial), and when nearly half way up step out on to Alessi's roof, whence we can view the havoc he has made. But he could not spoil Giovanni's rose-windows, and through one of them we see the castle on its green hill and the town below, cut into sections as though we were looking at the Umbrian world through a kaleidoscope.

The outside of San Rufino is so lovely that we should be inclined to advise none to enter, and thus spoil the impression it makes, were it not for the triptych by Niccolò da Foligno, "the first painter in whom the emotional, now passionate and violent, now mystic and estatic, temperament of St. Francis' countrymen was revealed."[1] Here we find a dreamy Madonna with flaxen hair, surrounded by tiny angels even fairer than herself in crimson and golden garments folded about their hips. The lunettes above are studded with patches of jewel-colour, angels spreading their pointed wings upwards as they seem to be wafted to and fro by a breeze. Four tall and serious saints stand round the Virgin like columns; to the right St. Peter Damian busily writing in a book, and St. Marcello, an Assisan martyr of the fourth century who might pass for a typical Italian priest of the present day. On the left

[1] Bernhard Berenson, "Central Italian painters of the Renaissance," p. 86.

is St. Rufino in the act of giving his pastoral blessing, and St. Esuberanzio, another of Assisi's early martyrs, holding a missal. They stand in a meadow thickly overgrown with flowers drawn with all Niccolò's firm outline and love of detail. Fine as the picture is, it cannot compare with the charming predella where the artist has worked with the delicacy of a miniature painter. It represents the martyrdom of St. Rufino; in the first small compartment the Roman soldiers on horseback, their lances held high in the air, followed by a group of prying boys, watch the Bishop's tortures as the flames shoot up around him; and in the distance are two small hill-towns with the towers of Costano in the plain. Then follows the scene where two young Assisan Christians have come down to the Chiaggio to rescue the body of their saint from the river. He lies stiffly in their arms, attired in his episcopal vestments, and the water has sucked the long folds of his cope below its surface. The last represents the procession of citizens led by Bishop Basileo bringing St. Rufino's body from Costano, and is one of the most exquisite bits of Umbrian painting. Niccolò has placed the scene in early morning, the air is keen among the mountains, the sun has just reached Assisi, seen against the white slopes of Subasio, and turns its houses to a rosy hue, while the tiny wood in the plain is still in deepest shadow. The white-robed acolytes mount the hill in the sunlight followed by the people and the heifers which ought, Niccolò has forgotten, according to the legend, to have led the way. The picture is signed Opus Nicholai De Fuligneo MCCCCLX.

The only other fine things in the cathedral are the stalls of intarsia work of carved wood, by Giovanni di Pier Giacomo da San Severino (1520), a pupil of the man who executed the far finer stalls in San Francesco. In the chapel of the Madonna del Pianto is a

curious wooden statue of the Pietà, how old and whether of the Italian or French school it is difficult to say. A tablet records that in 1494 because of the great dissensions in the town this Madonna was seen to

THE DOME AND APSE OF SAN RUFINO FROM THE CANON'S GARDEN

weep, for which she has been much honoured, as is shown by the innumerable ex-votos hung by the faithful round her altar.

The marble statue of St. Francis is by the French artist, M. Dupré (a replica in bronze stands in the Piazza), while that of St. Clare is by his daughter, who both generously gave their work to Assisi in

1882. The statue of St. Rufino is by another Frenchman, M. Lemoyne.

The proudest possession of San Rufino is the font in which St. Francis, St. Clare, St. Agnes and Frederick II, were baptised, and the stone is shown upon which the angel knelt, who in the disguise of a pilgrim assisted at the baptism of Assisi's saint. Often did Francis come to San Rufino to preach when the small church of S. Giorgio could no longer hold the crowds who flocked to hear him, and the hut where the saint spent his nights in prayer and meditation before he preached in the cathedral is now a chapel. This was the place of the miracle when his companions at Rivo-Torto saw him descend towards them in a chariot of fire (see p. 238). In the time of the saint it was the cottage of a market-gardener and still stands amidst a vineyard, one of the prettiest and sunniest spots in the town, where vines, onions, wild flowers and cherry trees grow in happy confusion, and birds and peasants sing all day long.

The charm of the Cathedral is best realised after witnessing one of its many ceremonies, when the canons in crimson and purple, processions of scarlet clothed boys swinging censers, and the Bishop seated beneath a canopy of yellow damask his cope drawn stiffly to the ground by a fussing acolyte, recall some of the magnificence of the middle ages. The young priests bow low before the Bishop on their way to the altar, return to their seats and bow again ; incense fills the church ; the organ peals half drown the tenor's song, and through it all, from the stalls, drone the voices of the canons reciting their office. It is a gorgeous service but without a congregation, for even the beggars have not stolen in ; and Niccolò's Madonna looks out upon the scene with big soft eyes which seem to follow us into the darkest corners of the aisles.

Roman Assisi.

Assisi is so much a place of one idea—of one interest—around which everything has grown, that it is difficult to remember that a fairly important town existed in Roman times, and that the Roman buildings, still to be seen are, in the opinion of Mr Freeman, worth a visit even if the church of San Francesco had never arisen. Some pleasant hours may be passed finding the sites of pagan monuments, the remains of ancient walls, and tracing the outline of the original town. In every case we see how Roman Assisi has, in a very marked way, become part of Mediæval Assisi, palaces having been erected upon the foundations of Roman houses and Christian churches upon the sites of ancient temples. The Temple of Hercules stood at the bend of Via S. Quirico (now Via Garibaldi) where it turns up to the ancient palace of the Scifi; while the Porta Mojano, near which old walls and part of an aqueduct can be seen, took its name from a temple of Janus which stood between it and the Vescovado. Standing a little off the Piazza Nuova, in a part of the town known as the "Gorga," are the remains of the amphitheatre. It would be difficult to find much of the original edifice, but houses having been built exactly on the ancient site its shape has been preserved, and this strange medley of old and new was thought worthy of a doric entrance gate by Galeazzo Alessi. Much the same thing has happened with many of the castles in the country near Assisi, where the peasant houses are grouped round them in such a way that only by penetrating into the midst of a tangled mass of dwellings can the vestige of a tower be here and there discerned to remind us of its former state. Assisi, though of no military importance at that time, aspired to become a little Roman town even more perfect than her neigh-

bours on the hills. The broad and strongly built drain which extends from near the Porta Perlici beneath the Piazza Nuova to the garden behind San Rufino, is said to have been used to carry off the water from the amphitheatre after the mimic sea-fights which in Roman times were so popular. A use was found for all things, and in time of war a Roman drain proved a most efficient means of escape, especially when the Baglioni were raiding the town and putting to death all they met upon their road.

Some small remains of a Roman theatre are to be seen near the cathedral but so buried amidst a wild garden that it is difficult to form any just idea of its extent. The most splendid piece of masonry, a Roman cistern, lies beneath the campanile of the cathedral and can be easily looked into by the light of a torch, the sacristan even suggests a descent into its dark depths by means of a rickety ladder. An inscription recording the proud fact that Assisi possessed an amphitheatre has been removed to the cathedral where it is placed above the side entrance to the left. Other large portions of Roman walls are to be found at the back of a shop in the Via Portica and also in the Via San Paolo; both are marked upon the map. In those days the town seems to have been identical with what we now call old Assisi, namely the quarter round San Rufino extending to the portion round San Francescuccio where are noticed the arched Lombard windows.

But by far the most interesting record of this early age is the Temple of Minerva, which in spite of the damage done when it was turned into a church, and the way in which the mediæval buildings are crowded round it, yet remains one of the most beautiful of ancient monuments. The raising of the Piazza makes it difficult to realise, without going below ground, how

imposing the temple must have been when its steps led straight down to the Forum. This can be reached by descending from the Piazza into the "scavi," or excavations, where stands the great altar with drains for the blood of the victims; the long inscription giving the name of the donor of the Temple runs:

GAL. TETTIENVS PARDALAS ET TETTIENA GALENE TETTRASTILVM SVA PECVNIA FECERVNT, ITEM SIMVLACRA CASTORIS ET POLLVCIS. MVNICIPIBVS ASISINATIBVS DONO DEDER. ET DEDICATIONE EPVLVM DECVRIONIBVS SING. XV. SEVIR. XIII. PLEBI X. DEDERVNT. S.C.L.D.

It is well known that Goethe went to Assisi solely to see the Temple, and surprised the citizens by going straight down the hill again without stopping to visit San Francesco. He wished to keep unimpaired the impression this perfect piece of classical architecture had made upon his mind, and we cannot refrain from translating his enthusiastic description of it for these pages.

"From Palladio and Volkmann I had gathered that a beautiful temple of Minerva, of the time of Augustus, was still standing and perfectly preserved. Asking a good-looking youth where Maria della Minerva was, he led me up through the city which stands on a hill. At length we reached the oldest part of the town, and I beheld the noble building standing before me, the first complete monument of ancient days that I had seen. A modest temple as befitted so small a town, yet so perfect, so finely conceived, that its beauty would strike one anywhere. But above all its position! Since reading in Vitruvius and Palladio how cities ought to be built and temples and other public edifices situated, I have a great respect for these things. . . . The temple stands half way up the mountain, just where two hills meet together, on a piazza which to this day is called the Piazza. . . .

In old times there were probably no houses opposite to prevent the view. Abolish them in imagination, and one would look towards the south over a most fertile land, whilst the sanctuary of Minerva would be visible from everywhere. Probably the plan of the streets dates from long ago as they follow the conformation and sinuosities of the mountain. The temple is not in the centre of the Piazza, but is so placed that a striking, though fore-shortened, view of it is obtained by the traveller coming from Rome. Not only should the building itself be drawn but also its fine position. I could not gaze my full of the façade; how harmonious and genial is the conception of the artist. . . . Unwillingly I tore myself away, and determined to draw the attention of all architects to it so that correct drawings may be made; for once again have I been convinced that tradition is untrustworthy. Palladio, on whom I relied, gives us, it is true, a picture of this temple, but he cannot have seen it, as he actually places pedestals on the level whereby the columns are thrown up too high, and we have an ugly Palmyrian monstrosity instead of what is a tranquil, charming object, satisfying to both the eye and the understanding. It is impossible to describe the deep impression I received from the contemplation of this edifice, and it will produce everlasting fruit."[1]

S. Paolo[2]

A little off the Piazza della Minerva is the old Benedictine church dedicated to St. Paolo, erected in 1074, when it probably stood alone with its monastery

[1] Goethe's Werke, *Italiänische Reise*, I., vol. 27, pp. 184, *et seq.*, J. G. Cotta, 1829.

[2] The key is obtained from the Canonico Modestini's house, No. 27a Via S. Paolo.

and not, as now, wedged in with other houses. Built in the very heart of Roman Assisi, its foundations rest upon solid walls of travertine, where a secret passage reaches to the castle. In this part of the town there are several underground passages spreading out in various directions, reminding us of the insecurity of life in the early times when Pagan consuls persecuted the weaker Christian sect. Just within the doorway of the church, now alas thickly coated with white-wash, is an ionic column belonging to some building of importance which must have stood within the Forum. Few people visit S. Paolo as it is only mentioned in local guide-books, and the passing stranger is generally told that there is nothing to see which is borne out by the modesty of its exterior; but no lover of the early Umbrian school who has the time to spare should fail to step in, if only for a moment, as on a wall to the left of the entrance is a large fresco by Matteo da Gualdo. He has signed the date in the corner—1475—though not his name, but it would be difficult to mistake so characteristic a work of this delightful painter. The Virgin, tall and stately, is accompanied by St. Lucy, who holds her eyes upon a dish and is clothed in a richly coloured orange gown falling in heavy folds about her; on the other side is St. Ansano, the patron of the Sienese, looking in his elegant green jacket, trimmed with fur, more like a courtier than a holy martyr. He holds his lungs in one hand, because he is a patron of people suffering from consumption, but why we know not, as there was nothing in the way he met his death in the river Arbia by the order of Diocletian to explain the presence of this strange symbol. He stands in Matteo's fresco very daintily by the Madonna's side, pointing her out to the small donor who is seen kneeling in a doorway. The colour is deep, perhaps a little crude, and if the figures may

seem somewhat stiff and their draperies angular, all such defects are amply redeemed by the small angels on the arch above, who composedly gaze down upon the Madonna as they sing and play to her.

Palazzo Pubblico or Palazzo Communale

In the beginning of the thirteenth century the civil affairs of Assisi had assumed such large proportions that it was found impossible to transact business in unsheltered quarters of the piazza as had hitherto been done, and the citizens determined to build a Palazzo Pubblico. Other towns were rising to municipal importance, notably Perugia whose palace for her priors proved a beautiful example of a gothic building, while Assisi was directing all efforts to adorn her churches. A house was bought belonging to the same Benedictine abbot of Mount Subasio, who had given the humble dwellings to St. Francis, and on its site they erected the present municipal palace, which was enlarged in 1275 and again in the fifteenth century, but it always remained a humble building with little pretensions to fine architecture. Here the priors and the consuls ruled the citizens in the absence of a despot, while in the palace of the Capitano del Popolo (now the residence of the Carabinieri), whose tower dates from 1276, the council of the citizens met to check the tyranny of the governing faction. These municipal magnates lived upon opposite sides of the Piazza, and acted as a drag upon each other in civil matters. The many small towns, villages and castles which were beneath the yoke of Assisi in mediæval times have been represented by a modern artist in the entrance hall of the Palazzo Pubblico, and are a happy record of her days of con-

quest and prosperity, which are duly remembered by the citizens. There is also a picture by Sermei of St. Francis blessing Assisi from the plain which, painted in the sixteenth century, is interesting as a likeness of the town at that time. There is also a picture of Elias hung upon the wall, intended as a portrait and not as an object for popular devotion. An effort has been made to adapt one of the rooms as a gallery of Umbrian art, and a few frescoes taken from walls and convents and transferred to canvas are preserved here, giving some idea, notwithstanding their ruined condition, of the liberal way in which Umbrian artists distributed their work in every corner of the town. The gateway of S. Giacomo exposed to constant sun, wind and rain, was yet thought a fitting place for Fiorenzo di Lorenzo to paint a fresco of a beautiful Madonna. It now looks sadly out of place in this room of the Municipio with a little paper ticket on the corner of the canvas marking it as No. 17. The half figures of angels, No. 23 and No. 24, by Matteo da Gualdo, were taken from the Confraternity of S. Crispino together with No. 21. From the Chiesa dei Pellegrini came No. 5, the Madonna and Saints by Ottaviano Nelli of Gubbio ; while No. 6, a Madonna, with angels holding a red damask curtain behind her, was found at the fountain of Mojano and is attributed to Tiberio d'Assisi. That mysterious painter L'Ingegno d'Assisi may be the author of No. 12. Vasari recounts how he learnt his art in the workshop of Perugino in company with Raphael, and even helped his master in the Cambio frescoes. His real name was Andrea Aloisi, the nickname of Ingegno arising from the fact that he was looked up to by his fellow citizens as a very remarkable man, for not only could he paint beautiful Madonnas but he was a distinguished Procurator, Arbitrator, Syndic and Camerlingo Apostolico. But

to try and trace his work is like following a will-o'-the-wisp, for no sooner do we hear of a fresco by him than it eventually turns out to be by Fiorenzo di Lorenzo or by Adone Doni, and this fresco in the Municipio is the only one in Assisi which may be by him. If it is, Tiberio d'Assisi would seem to have been his master and not Perugino.

In the same room is a small but interesting painting in fresco (No. 87), the figure of a winged Mercury, which was excavated a few years ago in the Casa Rocchi, via Cristofani. In another room is the head of a saint which some believe to be also of Roman times, but a good authority attributes it to a late follower of Raphael. The saint's head is seen against a shadowy blue landscape, and like all Umbrian things has an indescribable charm, a feeling that the artist loved the valleys in spring-time, and tried to convey some of the soft colour of the young corn and budding trees into the picture he was painting.

The Chiesa Nuova

A little below the Piazza della Minerva is the Chiesa Nuova, built at the expense of Philip III, of Spain in 1615 by the Assisan artist Giorgetti and finished in seven years. Few people come to Assisi without visiting it, for although containing nothing of artistic value, it stands upon the site of the Casa Bernardone, and recalls many incidents of St. Francis' life. The small door is shown through which Madonna Pica passed when the angel disguised as a pilgrim told her that her son was to be born in a stable, and we see part of the cell where St. Francis endured such cruel imprisonment from his father, until his mother in the absence of Messer Pietro let him out to return

to his haunts at San Damiano and the Carceri.[1] Other places preserve more of the charm of the saint than the Chiesa Nuova.

Two buildings in the town are intimately connected with St. Francis, his father's shop in the Via Portica the entrance of which the sculptor of St. Bernardino's door at the franciscan convent has adorned with a beautiful pattern of flowers, shields and cupids; and the house of Bernard of Quintavalle which is reached from this street by the Via S. Gregorio. It is now the Palazzo Sbaraglini and has no doubt been much enlarged since the thirteenth century, but the little old door above a flight of steps bears the unmistakable stamp of age; it leads into a long vaulted room, now a chapel, which there seems every reason to believe was the one where Bernard, the rich noble, invited St. Francis to stay with him at a time when he doubted his sanctity. The story is too long to quote and extracts would only spoil it, but the pilgrim to Assisi should read it as related in that franciscan testament, the *Fioretti* (chap. iii.). Popular devotion has happily not tampered with this corner of the town as it has with the house of the Bernardone.

Sta. Maria Maggiore

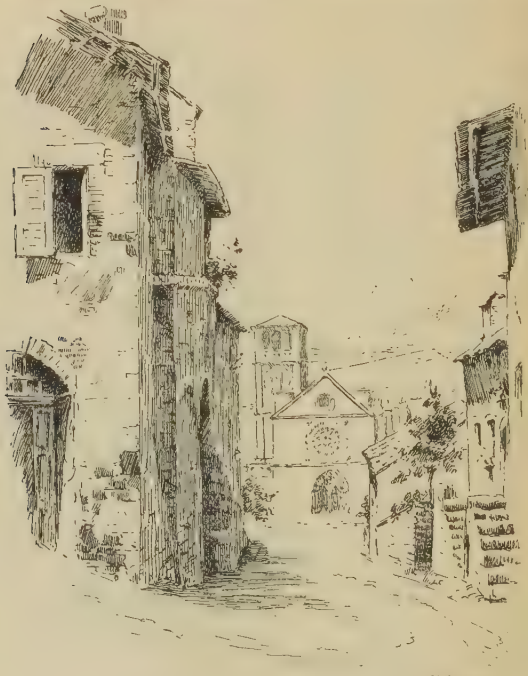
This romanesque church stands above a Roman building whose columns and mosaic floor can easily be seen from the garden behind the apse, and for many centuries it was the cathedral of Assisi as is testified by its close proximity to the Bishop's palace. But there is now little to remind us of any pretensions to splen-

[1] The legend that St. Francis was born in a stable only dates from the fifteenth century and arose out of the desire of the franciscans to make his life resemble that of Christ. The site of this stable, which is now a chapel, is of no interest whatever.

dour which it may once have possessed, only vestiges of the frescoes destroyed by the great earthquake of 1832 can be seen on its walls, and an Annunciation in a cupboard of the sacristy — in such strange places do we find an ancient fresco in Assisi. The church was already an old building in the twelfth century, for we hear of its being restored and enlarged after a fire by Giovanni da Gubbio, and finished later by the help of St. Francis who is said to have rebuilt the apse. One gladly hurries out of it into the little piazza which, though the humblest looking in Assisi, is very famous for the scenes it has witnessed. Here St. Francis renounced the world in the presence of his angry father, and received protection from Bishop Guido ; (see p. 235). Many years later the dying saint was brought to rest at the Bishop's palace near the church, and edified those who guarded the gates by singing so gaily in the midst of terrible suffering. Then again when a quarrel arose between Guido and the Podestà of Assisi, two

CAMPANILE OF STA. MARIA MAGGIORE

friars came up with a message of peace from St. Francis, then on his deathbed at the Portiuncula, who had heard with grief of the dissension. The story, and it is a true



EAST FRONT OF SAN FRANCESCO

one we may be sure, has been faithfully recorded by Brother Leo, who tells us how "when all were assembled together in the piazza by the Bishop's palace the two brethren rose up and said: "The blessed

Francis in his illness has composed a canticle to the Lord concerning His creatures, to the praise of the Lord Himself and for the edification of the people." It was the verse beginning "Praised be my Lord for all those who pardon one another for His love's sake," which he had added to his Hymn to the Sun (see p. 79). All listened intently to the message which so touched the heart of the Podestà that he flung himself at the Bishop's feet and promised to make amends for his offence for the love of Christ and the Blessed Francis. The Bishop lifting him from the ground spoke words of forgiveness and peace, and then "with great kindness and love they embraced and kissed one another."

Convents of S. Quirico and S. Appolinare

Every church and convent wall in Assisi was once adorned by frescoes, and even now, when time and ill-usage have done their best to ruin them, it is still possible to come upon delightful specimens of Umbrian art. But they are so stowed away in out of the way corners that one hardly likes to pass a door, however poor and uninviting, without glancing in to see what treasure may be hidden away behind it.

Curiosity was amply rewarded one day while visiting the convent of S. Quirico which we pass on the way from Sta. Maria Maggiore to S. Pietro, attracted there by the small fresco of the Virgin and St. Anne by Matteo da Gualdo over the door. The whitewashed parlour contained nothing of interest, not even a nun peered through the iron grating, but a murmur from the attendant about frescoes drew us to a window where, above the brown-tiled roof under a rough pent ledge, exposed to rain and wind, was a fresco of Christ rising from the tomb, and four small angels. It is not perhaps one of Matteo da Gualdo's most pleasing com-

positions and might be passed unnoticed in a gallery, but the thought of the wealth of Umbrian art, when masters left their paintings over gateways upon city walls, and above a roof where even the nuns can scarcely see it as they walk in the cloister below, give it a peculiarly Assisan charm which we cannot easily forget. A few steps further on, down the Borgo San Pietro, is the large convent of S. Appolinare, remarkable for its pretty campanile of brick, and a wheel window above the door. It once possessed many frescoes of the fourteenth and fifteenth century, but now it is not worth while to seek admittance for they are much destroyed; some have been ruthlessly cut in two by lowering the ceiling of the rooms, and only here and there, where the whitewash has peeled off, faces of Madonnas and saints look out like ghosts imprisoned in a convent wall.

S. Pietro

The church of S. Pietro stands upon a grass piazza surrounded by mulberry trees, with a broad outlook upon the valley. The central door, supported by two lions, has a twisted design of waterplants and birds which formerly were coloured, but now only show here and there traces of green stalks on a dark red background. A finely carved inscription above it records that in the year 1218 the cistercian Abbot Rustico built the façade, but its proud historians believe the church itself to have existed in the second century, thus claiming for it the honour of being the first church erected in Assisi. The present building cannot be older than 1253 when it was rebuilt after a great fire, and consecrated by Innocent IV. The interior is finely proportioned, and the remains of ancient frescoes discovered upon the walls show the zeal of

the Assisans in making all their churches, as well as San Francesco, as beautiful as they could.

In the small chapel to the left of the high altar are four stencilled medallions of a hunter with his dogs chasing a stag, besides symmetrical patterns like those of the nave of the Lower Church of San Francesco. Over the altar is a signed picture by Matteo da Gualdo (he was at Assisi in 1458, but the date here is partly

CHURCH OF S. PIETRO

effaced), of a Madonna with a choir of angels, and upon either side St. Peter and the Assisan martyr St. Vittorino. By standing on the altar steps a fresco of the Annunciation of the fifteenth century may be seen on the wall of the sacristy, discovered beneath the usual layer of whitewash some fifty years ago. The angel's profile, the hair turned back in waves from the face over the shoulders, is clearly outlined, and shows pale against the golden light of his wings. But the real treasures of this church, according to a pious author, are the bones of St. Vittorino, an Assisan

Christian who was the second Bishop of Assisi, and died a martyr's death in the third century. In 1642 these relics were deposited in a more suitable marble urn than the one that had contained them before, during a grand ceremony presided over by a Baglioni, Bishop of Perugia. Other bones and ashes of some Roman martyrs were afterwards added which were taken from the cemetery at Rome by the Abbot of San Pietro "to further enrich his church."

The Confraternities

An enduring mark of St. Francis' influence is seen in the number of confraternities established in Assisi which, if they have lost many of their primitive customs, still retain a hold upon the people and are the great feature of the town. Hardly a day passes without seeing members either preparing for a service in one of their chapels, or following a church procession, or carrying the dead along the cypress walk from Porta S. Giacomo to the cemetery. Clothed in long grey hooded cloaks, holding lanterns and candles and singing their mediæval hymns, these citizens of the nineteenth century belong to Assisi of the past as much as all her frescoes and early buildings. Their origin goes back to the middle of the thirteenth century when, out of the great devotional movement due to St. Francis, arose that strange body of penitents the Flagellants, who are said to have first appeared in Perugia, and thence spread throughout Italy.[1] "The movement," says Dr Creighton, "passed away; but it left its dress as a distinctive badge to the confraternities of mercy which are familiar to the traveller in the streets of many cities of Italy." Assisi was among the first to

[1] See *Story of Perugia* (mediæval series), p. 211, for the legend of their origin in that town.

witness the hordes of fanatics who roamed from town to town increasing as they passed like a swarm of locusts

CONFRATERNITY OF SAN FRANCESCUCCIO IN VIA GARIBALDI

through the land, and often at night going forth into the streets clothed in white garments to dance a dance of the dead, clanging bones together as they sang. It

was inevitable that their passage through Assisi should have its results, and many brotherhoods were founded; those who had no chapels of their own met in S. Pietro or S. Maria delle Rose, where they performed their penances, sometimes, as in the case of the Battuti (Flagellants), beating themselves as they sang the wild, love-inspired hymns of Jacopone da Todi, the franciscan poet of Umbria. Since those days their fervour has taken a more practical form, and very simple are their services.

The members of *San Francescuccio*, or *Delle Stimate*, ever to and fro upon some errand of mercy, belong to the most important confraternity, and own one of the most picturesque chapels in the towns. When its doors are open during early Mass or Benediction the sound of prayer and chanting comes across the quiet road, and in the blaze of candle-light is seen the great Crucifixion of Ottaviano Nelli (?) in the lunette of the wall above the altar. At other times, the chapel being so sunk below the level of the road with no windows to light it, both fresco and the charming groined roof, blue as that of San Francesco, can with difficulty be seen. The pent roof outside overshadows some Umbrian frescoes by Matteo da Gualdo recording the famous miracle of the roses which flowered for St. Francis in the snow, and which he offered to the Virgin at the Altar of the Portiuncula. On the wall to the right are some ruined frescoes in terra-verde by a scholar of Matteo.

Another confraternity in this street is *San Crispino*, which once possessed a picture by Niccolò Alunno, but that has long since disappeared, and only faint patches of colour remain above its gateway. There are many other confraternities, but as they do not all possess pictures of interest, we only mention three others; and first of these, the *Oratory of St. Anthony the Abbot*, or *Chiesa dei Pellegrini*, which every visitor

to Assisi ought to visit.[1] After the Church of San Francesco it is by far the most important sight of the town; a Lombard façade, a Roman temple, or a mediæval castle, delightful and beautiful as they are, may be seen elsewhere, but we know nothing with such individual charm as the little chapel of St. Anthony, in the Via Superba. So often a hundred vicissitudes arrested the adornment of a building during those troubled times of the middle ages, but here we find a small and perfectly proportioned oratory decorated with frescoes upon the ceiling and upon every wall, by two Umbrian masters who have sought to make it a complete and perfect sanctuary of Umbrian art.

Built in 1431 by the piety of the brotherhood of St. Anthony the Abbot, it served as a private chapel to the adjoining hospital, where pilgrims coming to pray at the shrine of St. Francis found food and shelter for three days. The liberal donations given by Guidantonio, Duke of Urbino and sometime Lord of Assisi, whose devotion to the saint was great, may have enabled the confraternity to adorn it with its many frescoes. Outside, in the arched niche above the door, are the patrons of the chapel, St. Anthony and St. James of Campostello, that great saint of pilgrims, with a frieze of small angels above them playing upon various instruments, also by Matteo da Gualdo. To him we owe the fair Madonna over the altar who gazes so dreamily before her, and sits so straight upon her throne. Angels

[1] The chapel is also called the *Chiesa di S. Caterina* because the members of that confraternity have charge of it. It is often open, but should it be closed, there is always some one about ready to obtain the key from the house in the same street Via Superba, now Via Principe di Napoli, No. 12, opposite Palazzo Bernabei.

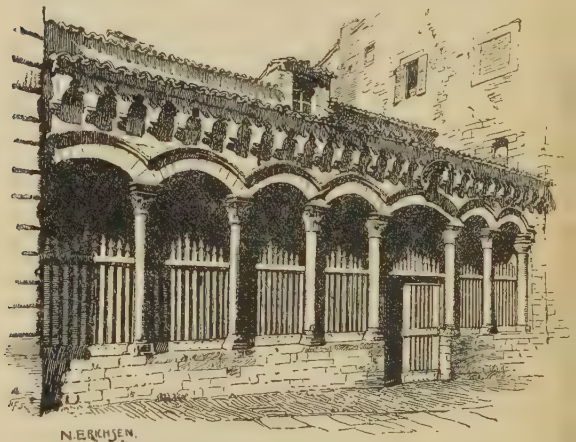
gather round bending towards their instruments with earnest faces; Matteo's angels can never only calmly pray, they must sing or else play on tambourines, viole d'amore, cymbals and organs. Less pleasing are the large figures of St. James and St. Anthony, while in contrast to them are the slender winged figures on either side bearing tall candelabra, and moving forward with such stately step, their white garments sweeping in long folds behind them, their fair curls just ruffled by the air. Surely Matteo must have been thinking of a group of babies at play in the cornfields, or under the hedges near his own Umbrian town, when he painted that frieze of laughing children, with little caps fitting so closely round their heads, who are tossing the branches of red and white roses up into the air. Each one is different, and all are full of graceful movement. They divide the frescoes below from that of the Annunciation, which recalls the manner of Boccatis da Camerino, the master of Matteo. He paints a swallow, the bird of returning spring, perched outside the Virgin's bedroom, to symbolise the promise of redemption, and a lion cub meant to represent the lion of Judah walks leisurely towards the Madonna.

Matteo da Gualdo, as the inscription tells, worked here in 1468, and Pier Antonio da Foligno, known as Mezzastris, came in 1482 to paint the rest of the chapel, and upon the right wall he related the most famous of St. James' miracles in a naïve and delightful manner. The legends tells how in the time of Pope Calixtus II, a certain German with his wife and son on their way to the saint's Spanish shrine of Campostello lodged at Tolosa, where their host's daughter fell in love with the fair young German. But he, being a cautious youth, resisted every advance of the Spanish maiden, who sought to avenge herself by hiding a silver drink-

ing cup belonging to her father in his wallet. The theft was discovered, and the judge of Tolosa condemned the young pilgrim to be hanged. Pier Antonio has painted the scene when the father and mother, after visiting Campostello, return to take a last look at the place where their son was executed and find him well: "O my mother! O my father!" he says, "do not lament for me, as I have never been in better cheer, the blessed Apostle James is at my side, sustaining me and filling me with celestial joy and comfort." In the fresco near the altar the story is continued; the judge, stout and imposing as one of Benozzo Gozzoli's Florentine merchants, is seated at a table in crimson and ermine robes surrounded by his friends, when the pilgrim and his wife arrive and beg him to release their son. Somewhat bored at being interrupted at his banquet he mocks them, saying: "What meanest thou, good woman? Thou art beside thyself. If thy son lives so do these fowls before me." No sooner had he spoken than, to the astonishment of all, the cock and hen stood up on the dish and the cock began to crow, as we see in Mezzastris' fresco. On the opposite wall are miracles of St. Anthony. In the fresco near the door he is sitting in the porch of the church surrounded by his companion hermits; they are watching the arrival of camels which, in answer to the saint's prayer, have brought a supply of food neatly corded on their backs. The artist has pictured the desert with sandy mountains, little flowers growing in the burning sand and thick grass in the wood by the convent. In the second fresco St. Anthony, beneath a portico of lapis lazzuli and green serpentine, is distributing the food brought by the friendly camels, to the beggars, who appear as suddenly upon the scene as the beggars do in an Assisan street.

The four figures in the ceiling, Pope Leo III, St.

Bonaventure, St. Isidor of Seville and St. Augustine, and the angels with shield-shaped wings, are also by Mezzastris. A graceful piece of his work is the Christ above the door, in a glory of angels who form a wreath around Him with their wings like sheaves of yellow wheat. Delightful, but very different from



MONTE FRUMENTARIO IN THE VIA PRINCIPE DI NAPOLI

Matteo's, are the cupid-angels flying across the sky on clouds, and the two seated playing with a shield upon which is painted the pilgrim's scallop-shell.

The figure of St. James near the door is of small interest, being a much restored work of a pupil of Perugino; but in the dark corner on the other side is, says Mr Berenson, a youthful work of Fiorenzo di Lorenzo. It is the young St. Ansano holding his lungs suspended daintily from one finger as in the fresco of S. Paolo, and looking so charming in his page's

dress, his fair curls falling about his shoulders. He stands at the entrance of a cave with pointed rocks above, and saxifrage and ferns delicately drawn are growing in their crevices. Would that Mezzastris had given his pupil a larger space of wall to work on, so that we might have had more saints and landscapes like these. We leave the chapel with regret, giving one last look at Matteo's Madonna and his frieze of child-angels, and then go out into the long broad Via Principe di Napole. Its fine palaces, once the abode of some of the richest nobles of the town, have now been turned into schools and hospitals, and our thoughts once more revert to the past days of prosperity and magnificence as we walk along this grand but silent street where the grass grows unmolested between the stones. A little way further on to the right is the fine *loggia* of the *Monte Frumentario* which in olden times was an agricultural Monte di Pietà, where the peasants who had no other possessions than the produce of the fields would come to pawn their grain in time of need. The door is finely sculptured, and the delicate chiselling of the capitals of the pillars of the *loggia* mark it as a work of the fourteenth century. Not far from the Chiesa dei Pellegrini, but to the left, stands one of the oldest Assisan houses which does not seem to have suffered much alteration since it was built. It was the lodge of the Comacine guild of workers, who have left their sign of the rose between the compass over the entrance, and two pieces of sculpture, showing that those to whom the house belonged were people who worked at some trade. It does not appear to have been a dwelling-house, but only a place where the members of the guild, employed in building the different civil and religious buildings for the Assisans, could meet together to discuss their interests, draw out their plans and execute

different pieces of their work. They probably did not build the house, but perhaps in the year 1485, which is the date above the door, adapted for their use one already standing.[1] It is always pointed out as the *Casa di Metastasio*, but his paternal dwelling is a less interesting house, standing at the angle of Via S. Giacomo and Via S. Croce, which can be reached from the Comacine Lodge by the steep by-street of S. Andrea. Metastasio, though the Trapassi were Assisans, had little to do with the town as his family were engaged in trade at Rome, where he was born in 1698. There he was found improvising songs to a crowd of wondering people by the celebrated Vincenzo Gravina, who adopted and educated him. When set to music, Metastasio's poetry brought all Rome to his feet and earned him the title of Cæsarean poet from the Emperor Charles VI; he ended his life at the court of Vienna as the favourite of Maria Theresa, honoured by all the great musicians of the day. Truly he has little to do with Assisi, yet he must be added to the list of her numerous illustrious citizens.

HOUSE OF THE COMACINE BUILDERS IN THE VIA PRINCIPE DI NAPOLE

Following the street by the Casa di Metastasio,

[1] See Signor Alfonso Brizi's *Loggia dei Maestri Comacini in Assisi*, No. 1, April 185, of the *Atti dell' Accademia Properziana del Subasio in Assisi*.

we get into delightful lanes above the town and reach another little confraternity, the oldest of all, *San Rufinuccio*.[1] Its small chapel, built of alternate layers of pink and white Subasian stone, is a very characteristic example of an Umbrian way-side sanctuary, always open in the olden days for the peasants to come into for rest and prayer. It is worth a visit, not only because the way there is beautiful, but also for the grand Crucifixion painted above the altar by the decorator of St. Nicholas' Chapel in San Francesco. It is a strong and splendid composition, which even much repainting has been unable to destroy. Unfortunately the scenes at the sides can only just be seen. Below, the half-length Madonna and angels by another artist recall the Annunciation of S. Pietro, in the marked outline of their pale faces and the rainbow colour of clothes and wings.

Turning off from the Via Nuova to the left we mount still higher through the olive groves along a path possessing no name, but which is the nicest way to the heights above the town. We come in a few minutes to the confraternity of *San Lorenzo*, standing somewhat below the level of the castle. It has nothing of interest inside, but behind the wooden covering of the gateway at the side is a fresco by an unknown Umbrian artist, an Assisan perhaps, who above the Virgin's throne signs himself "Chola Pictor." He paints the faces of his saints with a smooth surface, betraying the influence of Simone Martini which he felt together with many of his fellow Umbrian artists. The Virgin's throne is full of wonderful ornaments; unfortunately the fresco has suffered from a large crack across the wall. Very quaint is a group of hooded members of the confraternity at her feet, and there is a charming

[1] Both the key of *San Rufinuccio* and *San Lorenzo* can be obtained through the sacristan of the Cathedral.

figure of St. Rufino, young, with an oval face and brown eyes, but to be seen only from the top of a ladder as he is painted in a corner of the arch. It has been suggested to remove this much-ruined painting to the safer custody of the Municipio, but we hope this will not occur, for, taken away from its gateway on the hillside, where the redstarts build their nests and the evening sun lights up the colour in the Virgin's face, its interest and charm would be lost.

The Castle or "la Rocca d' Assisi"

Within her city walls Assisi possesses nothing wilder or more beautiful than the undulating slopes which rise from the city up to the Castle, where wild orchises grow among the grass, and the hedges of acacia wind around the hill. The town lies so directly below, that by stepping to the edge and looking across the white acacias, we can only see a mass of brown roofs all purple at sundown, the tops of towers and the battlements of gateways. Then there are places where the grassy hillocks stand up so high that they hide the town altogether, and we seem to be looking out upon the broad vista of the valley from an isolated peak. At all times it is beautiful; but choose a stormy day in springtime, when the clouds are driving upwards from the plain only lately covered with mist, and the nearer hills are dark their cities catching the late evening sunshine as it breaks through the storm, while wind-swept Subasio looks bleak in the white light showing here and there patches of palest green. And behind us, cresting the hill, so near the town yet seen absolutely alone and clear against the sky, rise the tower and the vast walls of the Rocca d'Assisi, looking, not like a ruin crumbling beneath the constant driving

of wind and rain, but as though torn down in war-time, grand in its destruction. It stands upon the site of an ancient burial ground, where in remote times

LOOKING ACROSS THE ASSISAN ROOFS TOWARDS THE EAST

the Umbrian augurs came to watch for omens from the heights of a tower that is said to have crowned the summit. The legend of this building gave rise to the belief that a castle stood here in very early times which was taken by Totila when he besieged

Assisi. But it is more probable that when Charlemagne rebuilt the town in 733 after it had been destroyed by his army, he also erected a castle to enable the Papal emissaries to keep the people in subjection; or perhaps the citizens themselves may have wished to protect themselves more securely from passing armies (see p. 16). It ended by becoming, much to the displeasure of the people the residence of whoever held Assisi for the time, and in the twelfth century they experienced the despotic rule of Conrad of Suabia, who lived here with his young charge, Frederic II. When, by the superior power of the Pope, Conrad was driven out of Umbria, the citizens did their best to destroy the walls which had harboured a tyrant, and to avoid further tyranny they obtained an edict forbidding the erection of another fortress. But promises such as these were vain indeed, for when, in 1367, escaping from the hated yoke of the Perugians Assisi welcomed Cardinal Albornoz in the Pope's name as her ruler, she lent a willing ear to his plans for rebuilding the castle. The people were well satisfied as they watched the improvements he made in the town, and two centuries had so dimmed the remembrances of Conrad's tyranny, that they gladly assisted him, little deeming that they were giving away their liberty. Albornoz, not slow to perceive what a valuable possession it would prove to the rulers of Assisi, spared neither money nor efforts to make it large and strong. By his orders the castle keep, which we see to this day, called the "maschio," and the squarely-set walls enclosing it were erected, and in a very few years the Rocca again rose proudly on its hill, warning the Umbrian people of its newly-found importance, and enticing passing *condottieri* to lay siege to a town that offered so fine a prize. Albornoz also rebuilt most of the city walls

which had been so battered during the Perugian wars; we can trace them from gateway to gateway encircling the city, and it is curious to see how in the upper portion near San Rufino large open spaces exist, as if in those active days when the Assisans had hopes of becoming powerful, they purposely set the walls far back to provide for a large and flourishing town. The feeling of arrested growth is one of the most mournful spectacles, and we half wonder if the great castle dominating the heights was not in part the cause of it. There was war enough at the time, inevitable among the restless factions of a people groping towards freedom and power, but here above the town was placed a fresh cause of dissension and struggle against perpetual bondage through varied tyrannies.

Albornoz, in planning out the city walls, discovered that the part between Porta Cappuccini and Porta Perlici, where the hill descends towards the ravine, needed protection, so he built the strong fortress of San Antonio known as the Rocca Minore. It had a separate governor or Castellano, and though of minor importance, proved very efficient in repelling the attacks of besieging armies. The principal tower, though somewhat ruined, still looks very fine within its square enclosure of massive walls, now covered in places with heavy curtains of ivy, the home of countless birds. A pious Castellano in the fifteenth century left a fresco of the Crucifixion in the chapel with his portrait at the foot of the Cross, and as we look at it through the wooden gateway we are reminded of what otherwise from the deserted look of the place it is easy to forget, that people once lived and prayed at the Rocca as well as fought.

Cardinal Albornoz left the castle in charge of two Assisan captains, but from 1376 an uninterrupted line of governors received their salaries from whoever was

master of Assisi at the time. Always chosen from other towns their privileges were quite distinct from those of the civil governors; but in the fifteenth century, owing to the weakness of the Priors, who failed to keep order among the lawless nobles of the town, their power increased. The Papal Legate then gave into the hands of the Castellano authority to issue edicts which the Priors had to obey, and in 1515 he was invested with the title of Podestà and Pretor of Assisi. But none of these governors seems to have misused their power over the town, probably because their rule was of too short a duration to carry out any ambitious scheme. And when the despot for the time being of Assisi came to stay, he took up his quarters in the castle, ruling governors, magistrates and people alike. In the time of the despot Broglia di Trino, we hear of the Priors wearily toiling up the steep ascent to place before him the acts they had passed in the municipal palace. He received them always in the open air, holding his councils either in the first enclosure by the well, or in the second by the castle keep, where many important conclusions were arrived at, and plans for the city's dominion laid out.

So perfect is the harmony of the castle from wherever it is seen, that it is difficult to realise how many hands have formed it, how many times its walls have been battered down and rebuilt at different periods by popes, cardinals, and passing *condottieri*, who have nearly all left their arms upon its walls as a record of their munificence. After Albornoz had built the principal mass of fortifications little was done until 1458, when Jacopo Piccinino, the son of the great general, entered Assisi as master, and obtained immediate possession of the Rocca. His reign was short, but with the quick eye of a soldier he soon discovered the weakness of the western slope, and seeing that it might be carried by

assault from Porta San Giacomo, he laid the foundations of a polygonal tower and a long wall connecting it with the main building. The Comacine builders established in Assisi were employed and left their sign, the rose between the compass and the mason's square, upon its lower walls. But long before the work was half completed Piccinino sold the city to the Pope, and it was Æneas Piccolomini, Pius II, who, when he visited Assisi in 1459, ordered it to be brought to a termination; within a year the wall was raised to its full height, the tower received its battlements and the arms of the Piccolomini were placed above those of Piccinino. The covered gallery, running along the top of the wall from the castle, still leads the visitor to the giddy heights of the tower whence he obtains truly a bird's-eye view of all the country round, from Spoleto to Perugia, across range upon range of hills towards Tuscany, and from Bettona to the wild tract of mountainous country leading to Nocera, Gualdo and Gubbio.

To recount the full history of the castle needs a book to itself, and would include not only the history of Assisi but almost of all Umbria.[1] The possession of the Rocco Maggiore entailed that of the Rocca Minore and gave undisputed sway over Assisi, so that the desperate efforts made to hold it can be understood. During the intervals when Papal authority was relaxed, we find the names of many famous people whose armies fought for this much contested prize. Biordo Michelotti, Count Guido of Montefeltro, the two Piccininos, Francesco Sforza and Gian Galeazzo Visconti, were

[1] This work has been admirably done by Signor Alfonso Brizi. In his *Rocca d'Assisi*, published in 1898, he has given a very interesting account of its many rulers and vicissitudes, and a full description of the building, together with all the documents relating to it.

in succession its owners. Cosmo de' Medici obtained it from Pope Eugenius IV, in payment of a bad debt, and a Florentine governor ruled over it for a year. It even, together with the town of Assisi, became the property of Lucrezia Borgia, who received it from Alexander VI, as part of her dower on her marriage with Giovanni Sforza, Lord of Pesaro. Sometimes it happened that a private citizen of Perugia conceived the ambitious scheme of making himself master of the castle, and by fraud the Castellano would be enticed outside the gates and murdered with his family. But it always ended by Perugia, fearing the wrath of the Pope, or not liking one of their own citizens to gain so much power, sending an army to dislodge the tyrant, who soon lost his head. Sometimes criminals were kept imprisoned in the castle; we can still see the room in the keep where they scratched their names upon the wall, with many references to their horror of the place, and a roughly traced heart pierced with an arrow. Ordinary malefactors were shut up in a dark cell on the stairs. When their crimes merited death they were executed on the Piazza della Minerva, or if time pressed, the Castellano hanged them from the battlements of the fortress or threw them out of a window into the ravine below. The governors had a difficult and not a very peaceful time, for they had not only to guard against outside foes, but occasionally against a faction who attempted to get possession of the castle, and great on those occasions was the fight outside its walls. It was in vain that they took every precaution for the general safety, that a night guard walked up and down the Assisan streets playing his castanets to warn off all evil-doers, or that men-at-arms watched incessantly from the castle battlements. In the sixteenth century the castle became a prey to the rival families of the Nepis and the Fiumi who divided

Assisi between them. First it fell into the hands of Jacopo Fiumi and the Pope, Alexander VI, furious when he heard of this citizen's audacious act, wrote that "by love or by force" he would have his fortress back again; but Jacopo remained impervious to threats or promises and held out for another year, until the Priors fearing the anger of the Pope came to an agreement with him. Some thirty years later the Nepis obtained possession of it by treachery and violence, and it required all the astuteness of Malatesta Baglione, who was fighting for Clement VII, to dislodge them, while the Pope branded them and their adherents as "sons of iniquity" for having dared to wrest from the Papacy the castle of Assisi.

But the days of the great military importance of the Rocca were fast drawing to a close; Assisi, no longer oppressed by the nobles, harassed by the armies of Perugia, or alarmed by the coming of the despots whose power was on the wane all over Italy, lost her character of individuality as a fighting and turbulent city, and sank beneath the wise and beneficent government of the Papacy. With the arrival of Paul III, in 1535, the final blow was given to mediæval usages of war and scheming in Umbria. The great Farnese Pope was building his fortress at Perugia to finally crush that hitherto indomitable people, and fearing the Assisans might yet give trouble in the future to his legates as they had so often done in the past, he gave orders that the fortress should be repaired, and a bastion suitable for the more modern methods of warfare be built to the right of the castle keep. This is now the best preserved portion of the building. For some time a Castellano still remained in command of the castle but his title was purely a nominal one, and his chief duty seems to have consisted in guarding prisoners. Its political need having disappeared the

popes thought less of their Assisan fortress, the one lately erected at Perugia being more efficient as a safeguard of their interests, and gradually its walls showed

VIEW OF SAN FRANCESCO FROM BENEATH THE CASTLE WALLS

signs of decay, but no papal legates were sent to see to their repair. So terribly did it suffer during the years that followed the reign of Paul III, that in 1726 we read of the governor of the city sending an earnest

supplication to the Pope that "this strong and ancient castle of Assisi, which had always been the chief fortress of Umbria, should be saved from ruin." The Pope, he tells us in another letter, had already sent Count Aureli, the military governor of Umbria, to inspect it, who declared it was "one of the strongest and most splendid fortresses of the ecclesiastical states, and as fine as any he had seen in France or in Flanders, when as head page he had accompanied Louis XIV." In the same document there is mention also of beautiful paintings in the chief rooms, and of a miraculous Crucifixion in the chapel, but these decorations, needless to say, have long since disappeared. Entreaties were vainly sent to Rome; the castle was so utterly abandoned that its gates stood open for all to roam in and out as they pleased, pulling down the ancient arms of the popes, and vying with the storms to complete its ruin and destruction. Such was its strength that it endured the ill-treatment of seasons and of men, and people now alive remember in their youth to have seen it still roofed in and possessing much of its former magnificence. A little money might have restored it to its pristine state, but during those years of struggle for the Unity of Italy the general fever of excitement invaded the quiet town, and as if remembering all the tyrants their castle walls had harboured, and the skirmishes their ancestors had fought beneath them, the citizens continued its destruction with renewed vigour. It was no uncommon thing to see cartloads of stones being taken down the hill for the construction of some modern dwelling, or boys amusing themselves by throwing down portions of the walls, and trying who could succeed in making great blocks of masonry reach the bed of the torrent below. Luckily the government gave it over to the commune of Assisi in 1883 and they did something towards its repair, though within

certain limits, for a large sum would have been necessary to complete its restoration.

But it still remains a very wonderful corner of Assisi, and delightful hours may be passed sitting in the castle keep and looking out of the large windows upon a land so strangely peaceful, with little cities gathered on the hills or lying by some river in the plain. We see the battered walls around us bearing traces of ancient warfare, and wonder at the power which made the mediæval turmoil so suddenly subside. In vain we scan the valley for the coming of a warlike cardinal with glittering horsemen in his rear, or look for Gian Paolo Baglione riding hastily through the town upon his swift black charger. The communal armies met for the last time by the Tiber many centuries ago ; popes, emperors, *condottieri* and saints have passed like pageants across Umbria, and as if touched by a magician's wand have as suddenly vanished, leaving her cities with only the memories of an active and glorious past. Thus Assisi, with the rest of the smaller towns, gradually sank as a prosperous and governing city though decidedly not as a place of pilgrimage and prayer, into that deep sleep from which she has never again awakened.

CHAPTER XI

Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli. The Feast of the Pardon of St. Francis or "il Perdono d'Assisi"

THE sanctuary of the Portiuncula has, in its present surroundings, rightly been called a jewel within a casket—a casket indeed too large for so small a gem. But the great Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli was the best the Umbrians could procure for the object they loved best after their Basilica in the town, and the famous architects of the day were called in to build it.[1] A smaller shelter would have served the purpose in earlier times but the ever increasing flow of pilgrims who came in thousands for the "Perdono" rendered it necessary to think about a church large enough to contain them; and it was the dominican Pope Pius V, who enabled the work to be commenced in 1569, giving large sums to the vast enterprise. Jacopo Barozio da Vignola gave the ground-plan, leaving the execution of it, at his death in 1573, to be carried out by the well-known Perugian architect and sculptor, Giulio Danti, and his fellow-citizen Galeazzo Alessi, who designed the fine cupola and arches. The church was built in the doric style, divided

[1] St. Francis called the Portiuncula Santa Maria degli Angeli, but now the name is more connected with the large church. See p. 97.

into nave and aisles with numberless side chapels; and certainly they succeeded in giving it a great feeling of space and loftiness, which if less charming than the mysterious gloom of other churches yet seems to belong better to the open and sunlit Umbrian plain, where it rises as a beacon to the people for many miles round. The earthquake in 1832, which laid the villages near Ponte San Giovanni in almost total ruin, shook down the nave and choir of the Angeli creating havoc impossible to describe. By supreme good fortune, shall we say by a miracle, the cupola of Danti and Alessi remained intact above the Portiuncula, which otherwise would have been utterly destroyed. In rebuilding the church, Poletti, the Roman architect employed, deviated slightly from Vignola's original plan, and further he erected a more elaborate and far less elegant façade than the first one, but baroque as it is we may be thankful that the niches for statues of the saints have remained empty. There have been other earthquakes since that of 1832, and when they occurred a pyramid of faggots was carefully piled upon the Portiuncula for protection in case a miracle might not intervene a second time to save it from destruction.

The friars took an active part in the work, building the campanile and carving the handsome pulpit and the cupboards in the sacristy. The marble altar was given in 1782 by Mehemet Ali, the ruler of Egypt, and many noble Italian families contributed towards the erection of the chapels containing decadent paintings which it would be useless to describe or to look at. One priceless treasure ornaments the chapel of San Giuseppe (in the left transept), a work of Andrea della Robbia in terra-cotta of blue and white which is like a portion of the sky seen through the cool branches of a vine on a glaring summer's day. Andrea is truly the sculptor of the franciscans, for there are but few of his works

where an incident from St. Francis' life is not introduced, and with what feeling they are realised. On one side of the beautiful Madonna who bends to receive her crown from the hands of the Saviour, is represented with great dignity and simplicity St. Francis receiving the Stigmata, on the other St. Jerome and his lion. Beneath is a predella divided into three compartments, the Annunciation, Christ in the manger, and the Adoration of the Magi; and Andrea has framed in the whole with a slightly raised garland of apples, fir-cones and Japanese medlars, which suits the delicacy of the workmanship of the small scenes better than a heavier wreath of fruit and leaves. In the Capella delle Reliquie (in the right transept) is a Crucifixion painted on panel by Giunta Pisano (?) with medallion half figures of the Virgin and St. John; below are kneeling angels by an Umbrian artist, whose work contrasts most strangely with the ancient painting belonging to the dark years before Giotto.

In a preceding chapter we lamented the efforts that have been made to decorate the Portiuncula, now alas no longer the shrine among the oak trees; not only in earlier centuries did Umbrian artists cover its rough stones in many parts with frescoes, but the German artist Overbeck has added another superfluous decoration to the façade, severely, but justly criticised by M. Taine, and a German lady has painted the Annunciation on the apse. A very small picture by Sano di Pietro of the Madonna and Child hangs above, a very charming example of the master's work. Very little remains of Pietro Perugino's Crucifixion, and what there is has been well covered over with modern paint. The choir of the monks built outside the Portiuncula having been removed in the eighteenth century half of Perugino's fresco was destroyed, leaving only the groups of people at the foot of the Cross, amongst whom we recognise St. Francis.

A naïve legend is recalled to us by the stone slab let into the wall close to the side entrance, recording the spot where Pietro Cataneo, the first vicar of the Order during the life of the saint, is buried. He was as holy as the rest of those first enthusiasts, and after death so many miracles were wrought at his tomb that the peace of the friars was disturbed. The case becoming serious they had recourse to St. Francis who, seeing the danger that their lonely abode would become a place of pilgrimage, addressed an admonition to Pietro Cataneo, saying that as he had ever been obedient in life so must he be in death and cease to perform such marvellous miracles. After this when peasants came to pray for some favour at his tomb no answer was vouchsafed, so that gradually their faith in his intercession ceased and peace again reigned at the Portiuncula.

The extent of the present church is so immense that the site of all the scattered huts of the brethren and the little orchard so carefully tended by the saint, are contained within its walls. Over what was the infirmary where St. Francis died St. Bonaventure built a chapel which Lo Spagna decorated with portraits (?) of the first franciscans, now seen very dimly like shadows on its walls by the flickering light of the tapers. Out of the half gloom stands strongly outlined in a niche above the altar, a beautiful terra-cotta statue of St. Francis by Andrea della Robbia. The hood is thrown back, the head slightly raised, and in the sad but calm expression of the exquisitely modelled face Andrea conveys a truer feeling of the suffering Poverello than all the so-called portraits. One of these, said to be painted on the lid of the saint's coffin by Giunta Pisano, hangs outside the chapel, but it looks more like a bad copy of Cimabue's St. Francis in the Lower Church, and we would fain leave with the remembrance unspoilt

of Andrea's fine conception. Passing through the sacristy containing a head of Christ by an unknown follower of Perugino and a small Guido Reni (?), we reach the chapel of St. Charles Borromeo where an ancient and much restored portrait of St. Francis, said to be painted on part of his bed, hangs above the altar ;

THE GARDEN OF THE ROSES AT STA. MARIA DEGLI ANGELI

it is in every way less interesting than the one in the sacristy of the Lower Church. From here an open colonnade leads past a little plot of ground, which in the days of the Little Brethren was the orchard of the convent. One day as the saint left his cell he stopped a moment to speak with the frair who attended to the land, "begging him not to cultivate only vegetables, but to leave a little portion for those plants which in due time would bring forth brother flowers, for the love

of Him who is called 'flower of the field and lily of the valley.'" Accordingly a "fair little garden" was made, and often while St. Francis caressingly touched the flowers, his spirit seemed to those who watched him to be no longer upon earth but to have already reached its home. On the other side, carefully preserved within wire netting, is the famous Garden of Roses, and standing in the midst, like ruins of some temple, are the four pillars which in olden times supported a roof above the Portiuncula. In the days when St. Francis had his hut close by, this cultivated garden was only a wilderness of brambles in the forest, and the legend tells how the saint being assailed by terrible temptation as he knelt at prayer through the watches of the night, ran out into the snow and rolled naked among the brambles and thorns to quiet the fierce battle within his soul. The moonlight suddenly broke through the clouds shining upon clusters of white and red roses, their leaves stained with the saint's blood which had fallen upon the brambles and produced these thornless flowers, while celestial spirits filled the air with hymns of praise. Throwing a silken garment over him and flooding his pathway with heavenly radiance, the angel led him to the Portiuncula where the Madonna and Child appeared to him in a vision. The legend has been often illustrated, Overbeck's fresco on the façade of the chapel records it yet again where St. Francis is represented as offering to the Virgin the roses he had gathered.

A few steps beyond the Garden of the Roses lies the Chapel of the Roses built by St. Bonaventure over the hut of St. Francis, which was afterwards enlarged by St. Bernardine. The place where he spent his few moments of repose and so many hours of prayer, can be seen through the grating on a level with the chapel floor, and resembles more the lair of a wild animal than

an ordinary abode of man; but such places were dear to him, and he rejoiced in having the open forest outside his cell into which he wandered at all times of the day and night, and where the brethren, ever curious to watch their beloved and holy master, could see him on moonlight nights holding sweet converse with heavenly spirits. The choir of the chapel is frescoed by Lo Spagna who repeated again the figures of the first franciscans, adding those of St. Bonaventure, St. Bernardine of Siena, St. Louis of Toulouse, and St. Anthony of Padua on the left wall, and St. Clare and St. Elisabeth of Hungary on the right wall. The fresco on the ceiling is said to be by Pinturricchio. The paintings in the nave by Tiberio d'Assisi are faintly coloured and a poor example of Umbrian art; only the last scene is interesting, where St. Francis publishes the indulgence in the presence of the seven bishops, as it gives an accurate representation of the Portiuncula in the fifteenth century with Niccolò da Foligno's fresco still upon the façade. It tells the legend of the "Perdono" which even to the present day plays so important a part in the religious life of Assisi, bringing crowds every year to the Portiuncula for whom the Angeli was finally built. Disentangling the story from the legend by no means diminishes its charm, while we get a very striking historical scene showing us St. Francis in yet another light. Once when the saint was praying at the Portiuncula, Christ and his Mother appeared to him to ask what favour he desired, for it would be granted by reason of his great faith. The salvation of souls being ever the burden of his prayers he begged for a plenary indulgence, to be earned by all who should enter the Portiuncula on a special day. "What thou askest, O Francis," replied Christ, "is very great; but thou art worthy of still greater favours. I grant thy prayer; but go and find

my Vicar, the Sovereign Pontiff Honorius III, at Perugia, and ask him in my name for this indulgence." Early next morning St. Francis, accompanied by Peter Cataneo and Angelo da Rieti, started along the road to Perugia where Innocent III, had but lately died and the pious Honorius been immediately elected as his successor. It was in the early summer of 1216 that the little band of friars were led into the presence of the Pope in the old Canonica, but not for the first time did St. Francis find himself in the presence of Rome's sovereign, gaining his cause now as before through the great love that made his words and actions seem inspired. At first the Pope murmured at the immensity of the favour asked but finally, his heart being touched by the fervour of the saint, he said: "For how many years do you desire this indulgence. Perchance for one or two, or will you that I grant it to you for seven?" The Pope had still to learn the depths of love in the saint's heart who stood before him pleading so earnestly for the souls of men, not during his life only, but during centuries to come. "O Messer il Papa," cried St. Francis in accents almost of despair, "why speakest thou of years and of time? I ask thee not for years, but I ask thee for souls." "It is not the custom of the Roman Curia," answered the Pope, "to grant such an indulgence."

"Your Holiness," said the saint, "it is not I who ask for it, but He who has sent me, the Lord Jesus Christ."

The Pope conquered by these words and driven by a sudden impulse said, "We accord thee the indulgence." The Cardinals who had remained silent now began to murmur and reminded the Pope, like cautious guardians of the Papal interests, that this plenary indulgence would greatly interfere with those granted for pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and for visiting the tombs of the Blessed Apostles.

"We have given and granted it to him," answered Honorius. "What has been done we cannot undo, but we will modify it so that the indulgence will be but for one full day." And motioning the saint to approach he said: "From henceforth we grant that whoso comes to and enters this church, being sincerely repentant and having received absolution, shall be absolved from all punishment and all faults, and we will that this indulgence be valid every year in perpetuity, but for one day only from the first vesper of the one day until the first vesper of the next." Hardly had the Pope ceased speaking when St. Francis radiant with joy turned to depart.

"*O semplicione quo vadis?* O simple child without guile, whither goest thou? Whither goest thou without the document ratifying so great a favour?" quoth the Pope.

"If this indulgence," answered the saint, "is the work of God, I have no need of any document, let the chart be the Blessed Virgin Mary, the notary Christ and my witnesses the angels."

Round this historical interview the legend makers wove the pretty story of the roses which flowered in mid-winter among the snow, relating that after the concession of the indulgence in the summer of 1216 occurred this rose miracle, and Christ in a vision bade the saint go to Rome in order that the day might be fixed for the gaining of the indulgence, and to convince Honorius of the truth of his revelation he was to carry some of the roses with him. But having already obtained the Pope's sanction at Perugia, it was unlikely that the saint would wait another year before proclaiming the glad tidings to all the country-side, and we may be sure that no sooner had he returned to the Portiuncula from Perugia than he made speedy preparations for the arrival of a great concourse

of people. On the afternoon of the first of August the plain about the Portiuncula was filled with pilgrims from far and near, and many friars hastened from distant parts to listen to their master's wonderful message. He mounted the wooden pulpit which had been erected beneath an oak tree close to the chapel, followed by the seven Umbrian bishops who were to ratify his proclamation of the indulgence. St. Francis discoursed most eloquently to the assembled multitude and then in the fullness of his joy cried out to them, "I desire to send you all to Paradise," and announced the great favour he had obtained for them from the Holy Pontiff. When the bishops heard him proclaim the indulgence as "perpetual" they murmured among themselves, and finally exclaimed that he had misunderstood the words of the Pope, and that they intended to do only what was right and ratify the indulgence for ten years. Full of righteous feeling the bishop of Assisi stepped forward to correct the error into which the saint had fallen, but to the astonishment of his companions he declared the indulgence to have been granted for all time. Then the others murmured still more, saying he had done this because he was an Assisan and wished to bring great honour to his diocese; so the bishop of Perugia, determining to set the mistake right, began to speak, but he found himself forced by a supernatural power to proclaim the indulgence in the very words of St. Francis. The same thing happened to the other five bishops, and St. Francis then saw his dearest wishes realised.

Daily the fame of the Portiuncula increased, and the year 1219 witnessed another immense gathering of people, but this time it was the meeting of the five thousand franciscan friars who came from distant parts to attend the Easter Chapter held by St. Francis in the plain. One of the most vivid and interesting

chapters (the xiii) in the *Fioretti*, pictures for us "the camp and army of the knights of God," all busily employed in holy converse about the affairs of the Order. It relates how "in that camp were shelters, roofed with lattice and mat, arranged in separate groups according to the diverse provinces whence came the friars; therefore was this Chapter called the Chapter of the Lattices or of the Mats; their bed was the bare earth, though some had a little straw, their pillows were stones or billets of wood. For which reason the devotion of those who heard or saw them was so great, and so great was the fame of their sanctity, that from the court of the Pope who was then at Perugia, and from other towns in the vale of Spoleto, came many counts, barons and knights, and other men of gentle birth, and much people, and cardinals and bishops and abbots with many other clerics, to see so holy and great a congregation and so humble, the like had never yet been in the world of so many saintly men assembled together: and principally they came to see the head and most holy father of all these holy men. . . ." [1]

The Pardon of St. Francis or "il Perdono d'Assisi."

We cannot study the story of any Umbrian town without experiencing the feeling that it belongs to the past and was built in an age, which can only dimly be realised in the pages of old chronicles, by a people who were ever hurrying to battle, bent on glory and conquest for their cities. The character of the in-

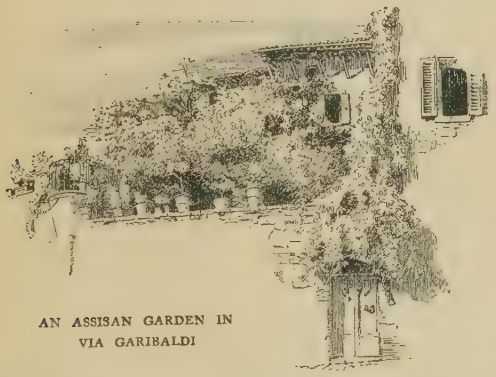
[1] St. Dominic was present at this famous gathering, and the *Fioretti* gives a curious account of the way in which he watched the doings of a brother saint, at first a little inclined to criticise his methods, so different to his own, but finally being won over by the franciscan doctrine of absolute poverty

habitants has changed, and though the wonderful little cities they built upon the hills remain much as in mediæval times, they have a peaceful and quiet loveli-

THE FONTE MARCELLA BY GALEAZZO ALESSI

ness of their own which could not have existed in those days of fevered struggle and unrest. The word Assisi brings up, even to those who have seen the town but for a day, a host of sunlit memories; of way-

side shrines with fading frescoes, whence Umbrian Madonnas smile down upon the worshippers; of ravines and forest trees; of vineyards where the peasants greeted you; of convent and Basilica glowing golden and crimson in the sudden changes from afternoon to sun-down, as they lie bathed in the last rays of light upon the hill above the darkness of the valley. All these things and many more pass through our minds, but the picture would be incomplete if we



AN ASSISAN GARDEN IN VIA GARIBALDI

fail to recall two days in August when the undying power of St. Francis once more reaches across the centuries, arousing the people to a sudden return to mediæval times of expiation, prayer and strong belief in the power of a great saint's intercession.

The very mention of a feast savours in Italy of delightful things, of songs, of crowds of happy-looking people bent on the pleasures of a holiday as well as on praying for the good of their souls, and as a feast at Assisi sounded fairer than any other, we determined to become for the moment pilgrims and seek with them

for the "Pardon of St. Francis." So as the days drew near to August we stood once more on the terrace of the Hotel Subasio, and as we felt the cool air of the early morning coming from the mountains, long days of interminable heat at Florence were forgotten, and Assisi, with her gardens full of sweet-scented summer flowers, her streets resounding only with the plash of the water of many fountains, seemed to us indeed to possess more beauty, variety and brilliancy of colour than we had realised before. Never had the nights been so still as in that late July, when the peasants had gathered in their harvest and were waiting for the time of vintage; only the shrill notes of the crickets answered each other occasionally along the valley, and the frogs croaked on the margin of the rills below the town. But soon this calmness ceased as the country roused itself for the annual spell of madness; there were voices in the vineyards during the night, bonfires in the plains, and a general tremor of excitement filled men and animals, setting the thin Assisan cocks crowing at unearthly hours in the morning. A night of sounds and wakefulness preceded a day when the people of all the cities and villages near appeared to have arrived in Assisi, not for the feast—for it was only the 29th of July—but for the fair. We followed them to the Piazza della Minerva, no longer the quiet place of former visits when only a few citizens sat sipping their cups of coffee, or talked together as they walked leisurely up and down. Temples, buildings and frescoes were forgotten as we watched the peasants gather round the booths to purchase articles of apparel and household wares, bargaining in shrill voices to the delight of purchaser, seller and onlooker. All the people of the country seemed to be here, and the Umbrian sellers had decked their stalls with a dazzling mass of coloured stuffs as

attractive to us as to the Umbrian women. We bought large kerchiefs with red roses on a yellow ground to wear over our heads at the feast, and enormous hats with flapping brims, which the peasants, always interested in a neighbour's purchase, helped us to choose, saying, "take this one for no rain will come through it, and you need never use an umbrella." So a sun-bonnet was bought for rain and we went away convinced that no more delightful shopping could be done than during a fair day at Assisi, when a passing farmer and his family were ready to help us to choose the goods and to bargain, and moreover comforted us in the end by the assurance that in their opinion the money had been well spent. Later we strolled up to the Piazza Nuova, where an immense fair of oxen was being held, transforming another sleepy corner of the town into a busy, bustling thoroughfare. They were quiet beasts enough and we walked in among them stroking their soft noses as we watched the groups of excited peasants performing the various rites of selling and buying. When an ox was sold the broker joined the hands of vendor and purchaser by dint of much pulling, and then shook them up and down, shouting all the while, until our joints ached at the sight of this energetic signing of a treaty. The bargaining causes enormous amusement, the discussion on either side bringing a current of eager talk through the crowd; only the oxen were thoroughly weary of the whole affair as they gazed pensively at their owners. They were large milk-white creatures, the whole place was one white shimmering mass seen against the old walls of the town and the blocks of Roman masonry, calling up idle fancies of Clitumnus down in the valley just in sight, whose fields had given pasture to the oxen of the gods.

The whole of that day Assisi was full of Umbrian men and women greatly concerned in buying and sell-

ing; but on the next the streets began to fill with people from distant parts of Italy, whose only thought was for St. Francis. At a very early hour of the 30th we were roused by the sound of many voices in the distance; going out on the terrace we saw a crowd of pilgrims coming across the plain, and others moving with slow steps up the hill. When near the Porta S. Francesco they knelt outside in the road and sang their hymn of praise before entering the Seraphic City. From dawn to evening a steady stream of pilgrims passed into the town, and the chanting, rising and falling like a fitful summer breeze, was the only sound to be heard throughout the day. Such different groups of people knelt together in the church, with nothing in common but the love for the franciscan saint whose name was for ever on their lips. They came from distant corners of Southern Italy generally in carts drawn by mules or oxen, for few could afford the luxury of coming by train. The Neapolitan women and those from the Abruzzi wore spotlessly white head-kerchiefs which fell round their shoulders like a nun's coif, a white blouse and generally a brilliant red or yellow skirt gathered thickly round the hips; the men were even more picturesque, with their waistcoats and knicker-bockers of scarlet cloth, their white shirt sleeves showing, and their stockings bound round with leathern thongs. Some of the women from the Basilicata wore wonderful necklaces of old workmanship, and gold embroidered bands laid across their linen blouses, while long pins with huge knobs of beaten silver fastened their headgear of black and white cloth. There were two women from the mountains of the Basilicata who wore thick cloth turbans, and blue braid plaited in and out of their hair at one side, giving them a coquettish air; they suffered beneath the burden of their thick stuff dresses made with straight short jackets and

skirts and big loose sleeves. Their felt boots were ill-fitted for Umbrian roads, and altogether they were attired for a winter climate and not for a burning August day in mid Italy. "Ah, it is cool among our mountains," they said with a sigh gazing wearily down at the plain which sent up hot vapours to mingle with the dust. Many of them had been three weeks on their journey and they look upon it as a great holiday, an event in their lives which cannot be often repeated for they are poor and depend for their livelihood upon the produce of their fields; but even the poorest brings enough to have a mass said at the Portiuncula and to drop some coppers on the altar steps. A few wandered through the Upper Church looking at Giotto's frescoes, but unable to read the story for themselves turned to us for an explanation when we happened to be there. They patted our faces, saying *carina* by way of thanks, but realised little or nothing about the saint they had come so far to honour, only being certain that his intercession was all powerful. Several peasants sat in turn upon the beautiful Papal throne in the choir, both as a cure and as a preventive against possible ailments, and thinking there was some legend as to its miraculous qualities we asked them to tell us about it. They looked up surprised and very simply said, "It stands in the church of San Francesco,"

WOMEN FROM THE BASILICATA

this was enough in their eyes to explain all miracles and wonders. A favourite occupation was kneeling by the entrance door of the Lower Church and listening for mysterious sounds which are said to come from the small column fixed in the ground. "What are you doing," we asked, cruelly disturbing the devotion of an old man in our desire for information. "I am listening to the voice of St. Francis," he answered, telling us that we might hear it too, but as he was in no hurry to cede his place to others we had no chance of verifying his strange assertion. The priests had a double function to perform, for while hearing confessions they held a long rod in their hands with which they tapped the heads of the peasants passing down the church; it was a blessing, which by the ignorant might be mistaken for some mysterious kind of fishing in invisible waters. At first the northern mind was surprised at the familiar way the pilgrims used the churches as their home, many being too poor to afford a lodging in the town. Especially at the Angeli we saw the strange uses side altars were put to; a family, having heard several masses and duly performed all their spiritual duties, would settle themselves comfortably on the broad steps of an altar, unfasten their bundles and proceed to breakfast off large hunches of bread and a mug of water; what remained of the water was employed in washing their feet. One man who had tramped for many days along dusty roads and wished to change his clothes, conceived the novel idea of retiring into a confessional box for the purpose. His wife handed him in the clean things and presently he drew aside the curtain, and emerged in spotless festive apparel with his travelling suit tied up in a large red handkerchief.

Late in the evening of the 30th we happened to be at the Angeli when a new batch of pilgrims arrived, and for a long time we watched them reverently ap-

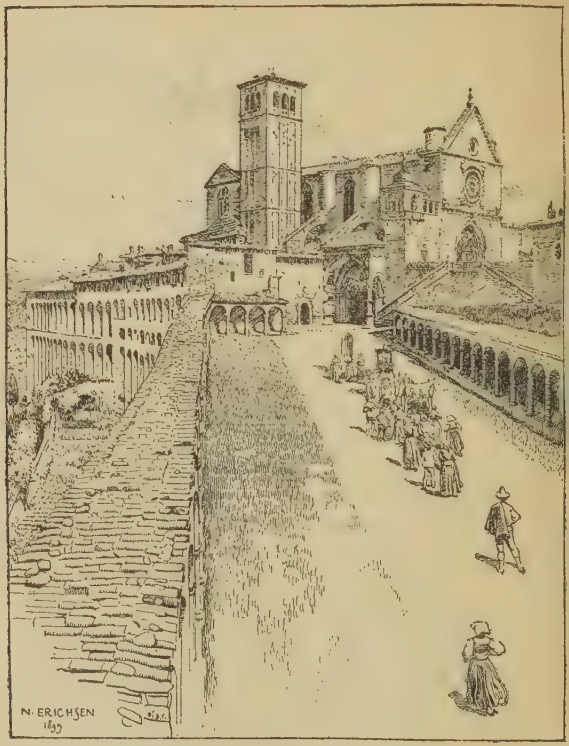
proach the Portiuncula on their knees, singing all the time the pilgrim's hymn with the ever-recurring refrain, "Evviva Maria e Chi la creò," which resounded through the church in long drawn nasal notes ending in a kind of stifled cry. There was something soothing in the plaintive, monotonous cadence as it reached us at the Garden of the Roses, where we had gone to breathe the cool air which blows across the open colonnade even on the hottest of summer days. We were listening to Father Bernardine's peaceful talk about St. Francis and the cicala which sang to him in the fig tree, and the lamb which followed the brethren to office, when suddenly we were startled by shrieks and screams in the church. "It is nothing, only the Neapolitans," said Father Bernardine, smiling at our distress. But unable longer to bear what sounded like the moanings of the wind which always fills one with uneasy feelings, half of fear, half of expectation that something unusual is going to happen, we hurried once again into the church. There a sight met our eyes which we shall never forget. Lying full length on the ground, their faces prone upon the pavement, were women crawling slowly, so slowly that the torture seemed interminable, from the entrance of the great church to the Portiuncula, and as they crawled they licked the floor with their tongues leaving behind them a mark like the trail of a slug. As we watched these poor penitents dragging themselves along, unconscious of aught around them and only overwhelmed by the consciousness that they must make atonement for past sins, a terrible sense of compassion, misery and disgust came over us. Who could restrain their tears, though they may have been tears of anger that people should be allowed to practise such ignoble acts of self-abasement. One girl especially called forth all our sympathy. She came running in out of the sunlight, and after standing for a moment

at the entrance with her eager face uplifted towards the holy shrine, her eyes alight with the strange look of one bent upon some great resolve, she threw herself down full length upon the ground and commenced the terrible penance which she had come all the way from the Abruzzi mountains to perform.[1] She was very slight and her black skirt fell round her like a veil, showing the delicate outline of her figure against the marble pavement. Resting her naked feet against the knees of a man kneeling behind her, she pushed herself forward with the movement of a caterpillar. Another man tapped his pilgrim's staff sharply on the floor in front of her face to direct her towards the chapel, whilst her mother ever now and then bent down to smooth away the tangle of dark hair which fell round the girl like a shroud. Though prematurely aged by toil and suffering, the elder woman had a beautiful face, reminding one of a Mater Dolorosa as with bitter tears she assisted at her daughter's deep humiliation. Just as this sad little group neared the Portiuncula the girl stopped as though her strength were exhausted, when the mother, choked by sobs, lifted the heavy masses of her daughter's hair and tried to raise her from the ground. The pilgrims pressed round singing "Evviva Maria e Chi la creò" until the sound became deafening, while the men struck the ground almost angrily with their sticks, and at last the girl still licking the ground crawled forward once again. When she reached the altar

[1] Those who know the teaching of St. Francis (see *Fioretti*, chap. xiii.) will feel how the saint would have fought against this device for the expiation of sins, invented by the priests of Southern Italy. No Umbrian has ever sunk to such depths of self-abasement, and during all the first days of the "Perdono" festival they keep aloof, waiting till the pilgrims' departure before obtaining their indulgences.

of the Portiuncula she stretched out one hand and touched the iron gates, and then like a worm rearing itself in the air and turning from side to side, she dragged herself on to her knees. As consciousness returned and the Southern blood coursed again like fire through her veins, she started to her feet and with wild cries entreated San Francesco to hear her, beating the gates with her hands and swaying from side to side. The cry of a wounded animal might recall to one's memory the prayer of that young girl, storming heaven with notes of passionate entreaty wrung from a soul in great mental agony. Other penitents came up to take her place almost pushing her out of the chapel. We last saw her fast asleep on the steps of a side altar curled up like a tired dog, but on her face was an expression of great calm as though she had indeed found the peace sought in so repulsive and terrible a manner. Silently we left the church and turned towards Assisi, breathing with joy the pure air and looking long at the hills lying so calm and clear around us. Next day, the 31st of July, there was an excited feeling in the town, not among the Umbrians, for they take the annual feast of the "Perdono" quietly enough, but among the pilgrims, who having now arrived in hundreds and paid their first visit to the franciscan churches of the hill and of the plain, stood about in the lower piazza of San Francesco waiting with evident impatience for the opening of the feast of the afternoon. We caught their feeling of expectation and found it impossible to do aught else than watch the people from the balcony, and then we went down and wandered about among them. There were such tired groups of women under the *loggie* of the piazza, leaning back in the shadow of the arches with their shawls drawn across their faces to shut out the glare of the August sun. A crowd of girls rested on the little patch of grass near the church,

some eating their bread, others sleepily watching the constant passage of people in and out of the church;



SAN FRANCESCO AND THE LOWER PIAZZA

for long spaces they sat silent, listlessly waiting, then suddenly one among them would rise and sing a southern song, sounding so strange in Umbria. Her companions,

casting off the desire to sleep, joined in the chorus until the song was ended and they once more became silent watchers. The shadows began to deepen round the church, the feeling of expectation increased, and the hours of waiting seemed long to the crowd and to us, when about four o'clock the dense mass of people in front of the church divided. A procession of priests in yellow copes filed out of the Basilica, one among them carrying the autograph benediction of St. Francis (see p. 210), and went to the little chapel near the Chiesa Nuova built over the stable where the saint is said to have been born. Here the holy relic is raised for the faithful to venerate, and the procession returns to San Francesco. It is a small but important ceremony, the prelude to the granting of the indulgence. We had reached the chapel before the procession, through side streets, but soon returned to the lower church for the crowd was intolerable, and we had been warned that once the blessing had been given a mad rush might be made to reach San Francesco and that sometimes people were trampled under foot. Out of the burning heat we entered the cool dark church where Umbrian peasants had already taken their places, as spectators, but not as actors in the feast. Seated on low benches against the wall they formed wondrous groups of colour, like clumps of cyclamen and primroses we have seen flowering in a wood upon an Italian roadside. The gates across the church had been shut, and were guarded by gendarmes; we had arrived too late. But presently Fra Luigi appeared at the gate of St. Martin's chapel, and hurriedly we followed him down the dark, narrow passage leading to the sacristy; we had only just time to run across the church and take our places outside the chapel of St. Mary Magdalen, when the great crowd surged into the church. The excitement became intense, and the

pilgrims who had followed in the procession as docile as lambs now could restrain themselves no longer, and hustled the priests forward, pressing them against the iron gates in their efforts to approach the altar. There was a moment of tension as the whole of the iron screen bent beneath the weight of the crowd when the gendarmes half opened the gate to allow the priests to pass through. With the relic swaying above their heads, they slipped in from among the pilgrims, who, finding the gates once more barred against them, began to moan and shout with deafening fury. The organ pealed forth mad music, the incense rose in clouds around the altar, and eager faces peered through the gates, which were battered with angry fists as the people pushed against each other so that the whole crowd rocked from side to side. Through it all stood the quiet figure of the priest, raising the relic high above the heads of the people whose voices were for the moment hushed, as the words of benediction were pronounced. Rapidly crossing the church, followed by his attendants, he entered the sacristy and shut the door, while four gendarmes stationed themselves at the corners of the altar to prevent people from mounting the steps, and others went to unbar the gates. There was a great creaking of bolts and hinges and in a moment the pilgrims rushed forward, afraid of losing even a single moment of the precious hours of indulgence, and cries of "San Francesco" almost drowned the sound of hurrying footsteps. Families caught each other by the arms and swept wildly round the altar, often knocking people down in their wild career, old women gathered up their skirts and ran, the Abruzzesi in their scarlet jackets, whom we had seen so calmly walking down the streets, stepped eagerly forward with outstretched arms and clasped hands calling loudly on the saint. Round they went in a perpetual circle, first past

the altar, then through the Maddalena chapel out into the Piazza, and back again without a single pause. Each time they entered the church they gained a new plenary indulgence. From the walls the frescoed saints leant towards us, and never had they seemed so full of peace and beauty, as on that day of hurry and strange excitement. We saw them through a mist of dust, but they were more real to us than the fanatics streaming past in mad career, and we greeted them as friends. Then as the sun went down in a crimson sky behind the Perugian hills, a great stillness fell upon the people, the gaining of indulgences for that day had ceased, and quietly those who had no shelters went into the country lanes to pass the night, or rested beneath a gateway of the town. Already Assisi was returning to her long spell of silence, for next morning at dawn the pilgrims would be on their road to Sta. Maria degli Angeli for the early morning mass.

Rashly we left the quietness of the town to join the crowd again down in the plain late the next afternoon when the feast was nearly over. The press of people was felt more at the Angeli than at San Francesco, as they gained the indulgence by simply walking round the church and through the Portiuncula without going outside. It was useless to struggle, or to attempt to go the way we wanted, for we were simply carried off our feet and borne round the church in breathless haste in the temperature of a Turkish bath. There were moments of suspense when we doubted, as the crowd bore us swiftly forward, whether we should pass the confessional boxes without being crushed against the sharp corners. The cries of "Evviva Maria, Evviva San Francesco," became deafening as we neared the Portiuncula, and the people surged through the doors, throwing handfuls of coppers

and silver coins upon the altar steps, and even at the picture of the Madonna above the altar in their extraordinary enthusiasm. How tired they looked, but in their eyes was a fixed look showing the feelings which spurred them on to gain as much grace as time would allow. They never paused, they never rested. With a last glance back upon the people and the names of Mary and Frances ringing in our ears we left the stifling atmosphere for the burning, but pure air outside.

How peaceful it all seemed in comparison to the scene we had just witnessed. The Piazza was full of booths as on a market day, with rows of coloured handkerchiefs, sea-green dresses such as the peasants like, and endless toys and religious objects; old women sat under large green umbrellas selling cakes, and cooks, in white aprons and caps, stood by their pots and pans ready to serve you an excellent meal. From under a tree a man sprang up as we passed with something of the pilgrim's eagerness about him, saying, "See, I will sing you a song and dance for you," shaking his companions from their sleep and snatching up his accordion, he began a wild, warlike dance upon the grass, while the others accompanied him with an endless chant. And so the hours crept on, until once again as the sun went down the pilgrims streamed quietly out of the church, but this time they gathered up their bundles and walked to the ox waggons which were standing ready in the road, and quite silently without delay they seated themselves, fifteen or twenty in a cart, to start upon their long journey home.

Never had the town been so deadly still as on the 2nd of August, when the inhabitants had gone down the hill to the church of the Angeli where they sought to obtain their indulgences now the pilgrims had

departed. Very quietly they knelt on the marble floor during the High Mass, silently they prayed, and with slow reverent steps they passed in and out of the Portiuncula until the Vesper hour, and the beautiful, calm evening then found them gathered round the altar of their saint. "Pray, ye poor people, chant and pray. If all be but a dream to wake from this were loss for you indeed."

APPENDIX

TO visitors who stay at Assisi for more than the usual hurried day, the following notes of walks and excursions may be of some use. A few of them have been already indicated by M. Paul Sabatier, in a paper printed at Assisi, to explain the sixteenth century map of the town found by him in the Palazzo Pubblico, of which a copy hangs in a room in the Hotel Subasio.

In the Town.—The public garden on the slope of the hill above the Via Metastasio is a delightful place. It was the ilex wood of the Cappucine convent until the present garden was laid out in 1882 by Sig. Alfonso Brizzi, when the friars' convent became a home for the aged poor.

From Porta S. Giacomo.—(*a*) A new idea of Assisi is obtained by following the mountain track from the Campo Santo round by the quarries and below the Castle to Porta Perlici. Looking across the ravine of the Tescio and up the valley of Gualdo and Nocera is a vision of Umbrian country in its austerest mood. Even if the whole of this walk cannot be taken we recommend all to follow the broad smooth road leading to the Campo Santo for a little, as the view of San Francesco and the valley beyond is very beautiful. (*b*) By taking the Via di Fontanella (see map), straight down the hillside, the picturesque bridge of S. Croce is reached in about twenty minutes. M. Sabatier recommends the ascent of Col Caprile just opposite for the fine view of Assisi, but those who do not care for an hour's climb would do well, having seen the old bridge and its charming surroundings, to retrace their steps, and after about two minutes turn off to the right through the fields along a narrow footpath leading to a bridge over the Tescio and a farmhouse. Following the right bank of the torrent we reach the Ponte S. Vittorino (see map), and return to the town by the old road skirting the walls of the franciscan convent and emerging opposite the Porta S. Francesco. Want of space prevents more being said than to urge all

visitors to go this walk, which is little known and will be found one of the loveliest they have ever seen. Every step brings something new; banks of orchis and cyclamen, glimpses of crimson and yellow rock in the brushwood by the hillside, the soft blue distance of the valley beyond, and above all, innumerable views of San Francesco, seen now with a bridge in the foreground, now framed in by the curved and spreading branches of an oak, and at every turn carrying our thoughts away to valleys of Southern France and fortress-churches crowning the wooded hills (see illustrations, pp. 215, 220). To realise the variety of scenery to be found in Umbria we must come to Assisi and hunt out her hidden lanes and byways.

From Porta Perlici.—(*a*) Out of this gate, turning to the left by the city walls, is one of the roads leading to the Castle; the others are clearly marked on the map. (*b*) The carriage road to Gualdo and Nocera goes for some miles along the valley, but is not completed.

From Porta Cappucini.—(*a*) The Rocca Minore is reached by a grass path going up the hill just inside the walls. A fine view of the eastern slope of Assisi is obtained (see illustration, p. 10). (*b*) The Carceri is about an hour's walk from this gate, donkeys are to be had in the town for the excursion, or a small carriage drawn by a horse and a pair of oxen can get there, but it is the least pleasant way of going.

From Porta Nuova.—(*a*) A pleasant though not the shortest way back to the town, is the one which skirts round the hill inside the mediæval walls from this gate to Porta Mojano, and then outside the walls through the fields past the Portaccia to the carriage road just below Porta S. Pietro. (*b*) The ascent of Monte Subasio occupies about two hours and a half, though quick walkers will do it in less time. There are several paths which anyone will indicate to the traveller. The easiest, though the longest (about four hours), is the one mentioned by M. Sabatier, the road to Gabbiano and Satriano, which branches off to the left from the Foligno road not far from the Porta Nuova. After walking along the Gabbiano road for an hour, a lane leads up the hill for another hour to the ruined abbey of San Benedetto (p. 82). The path skirts the mountain to Sasso Rosso, three quarters of an hour, the site of the fortress of the family of St. Clare, and then one hour and a half brings us to the southern slope of Mount Subasio called the Civitelle, where the craters of the extinct volcano are to be seen. The highest point

(1290 metres), is reached in another half hour. The view is very fine; Nocera and Gualdo lie to the north, Monte Amiata to the west, a range of snowy mountains to the south, Mount Terminillo, the Sabine Appenines and the mountains of the Abruzzi, and Mount Sibella to the east. The return to Assisi, without passing the Carceri, takes two hours. (*c*) The road to San Damiano is marked on the map; it is good but very steep, requiring oxen to draw the carriage up the hill on the return. On foot it is only a quarter of an hour from the gate. (*d*) A long day's drive will take the traveller to Spello, Foligno and Montefalco, but it is a tiring excursion and only a faint idea can be obtained of these beautiful Umbrian towns. It is better, if possible, to give a day to each, and to see Bevagna, with her two exquisite romanesque buildings, on the way to Montefalco.

From Porta Mojano.—(*a*) To follow the path taken by St. Francis, when carried from the bishop's palace to the Portiuncula (p. 111), just before his death, we must take the road leading from the gateway to a small chapel, and turn to the right down a lane marked Valecchio on the map. St. Francis either passed through Porta Mojano or the Portaccia (now closed), but from here we follow in his footsteps straight down the hill to the hamlet of Valecchio, set so charmingly on a grass plot among the walnut trees, with part of its watch tower still standing (p. 104). In the plain we come to cross roads; the one on the left leads to San Damiano in about forty minutes, that to the right to the leper hospital (now known as S. Agostino), whence St. Francis blessed Assisi for the last time (p. 111). (*b*) From the gate a few minutes brings us to a path crossing the fields to the left, to the old church of S. Masseo built in 1081 by Lupone Count of Assisi to serve as a chapel to the monastery, now the dwelling place of peasant families (*c*) From Porta Mojano a lane leads straight down to the plain, and just before reaching the high road where it crosses the railway at right angles, the chapel of S. Rufino d'Arce—the real Rivo-Torto—is seen in the fields to the left (see pp. 93-95). By the side of the lane close to the railway line is the chapel of Sta. Maria Maddalena (see pp. 93-95). This is about half an hour's walk.

From Porta S. Francesco.—There are several drives. (*a*) Perugia. (*b*) Bastia, the first station on the the railway between Assisi and Perugia, possessing a triptych by Niccolò da Foligno. A beautiful view of the river Chiaggio is ob-

tained at the bridge of Bastiola. (*c*) A road from the Angeli branches off to Torre d'Andrea, where there is a picture by a scholar of Pinturicchio. But more delightful is the chapel of S. Simone a little further on, built right in the midst of the cornfields, whose walls are covered with frescoes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. (*d*) A beautiful drive is to the Rocca di Petrignano, a hill-set village above the Chiaggio. To fully recount its story, the picturesqueness of its rock-cut streets and the charm of the chapel upon the heights, whose walls are covered from floor to roof with votive Madonnas and saints, would need a chapter to itself. It has been enthusiastically described by M. Broussolle in his *Pélerinages Ombriens*, but it may be well to remark that he calls the Rocca di Petrignano, for some unknown reason, the Rocca d'Assisi. (*e*) It is an hour and a half's walk to the church of S. Fortunato, across the bridge of S. Vittorino, recommended by M. Sabatier in his list of excursions. The way side chapel of S. Bartolo, with its interesting apse is passed on the way.

It would be well to get the Italian military map, Fo. 123 (either at Seeber, Via Tornabuoni, Florence, or at D. Terese, Perugia), if the pilgrim to Assisi wishes to explore the country round Assisi.

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